



**Decriminalization
Data Report to Health Canada
February 2023 – July 2024**

Submitted: November 2024



Ministry of
Mental Health
and Addictions

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1. Introduction

As part of the subsection 56(1) exemption granted under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA)* by Health Canada (“decriminalization”), BC is required to produce quarterly reporting on implementation and early outcomes. This data report provides insight into the early outcomes of decriminalization from four key dimensions: health service utilization, wellbeing of people who use drugs (PWUD), law enforcement, and public awareness and understanding of decriminalization.

New s.56 Exemption – May 2024

The original s.56 exemption came into effect on January 31, 2023, decriminalizing simple possession of small amounts of illegal drugs across BC with some place-based exceptions (e.g., school and child care premises, airports, motor vehicles). In September 2023, the exemption was amended to add additional exceptions for child-focused spaces. On May 7, 2024, due to concerns about substance use in public settings and at the request of BC, Health Canada replaced the exemption with [a new s.56 exemption](#) which decriminalizes possession of small amounts of illegal drugs only in specific locations, including:

- Private residences
- Places unhoused individuals are legally sheltering (indoor and outdoor locations)
- Overdose prevention, drug checking, and supervised consumption sites
- Places that provide out-patient addiction services like rapid access addiction clinics

The intention of the new exemption is to balance goals of public health, public safety, and other community interests by prohibiting the possession (a pre-condition to use) of illegal drugs in public spaces, and reinstating police authority to address problematic substance use in public spaces with a possession offense.

As outlined in the new [Letter of Requirements](#), Health Canada supports a discretionary model that ensures people who are simply in possession of drugs with no associated public safety risk are not subject to arrest or seizure of drugs. Police have received guidance to support treating addiction as a health issue not a criminal one, which outlines key changes in BC’s s.56 exemption and the public health principles informing them.

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This November 2024 report is the first quarterly report to present data following implementation of BC’s new s.56 exemption. Law enforcement and health service utilization data have been refreshed to include May to July 2024. There have been no changes to the report’s methodology.

Background

Harms of Criminalization

Substance use is criminalized in various ways that negatively impact PWUD. Forms of criminalization include formal police interactions (offences), police seizure of drugs, arrests, criminal charges, and convictions. A significant and growing body of research shows that these forms of criminalization do little to deter drug use and instead perpetuate harms to PWUD.^{i,ii,iii,iv,v} Interactions with police may deter PWUD from seeking emergency services or calling for help during overdose situations. Being arrested, charged, or convicted of simple possession negatively impacts an individual's ability to seek and hold employment and housing. Drug seizures are well documented to have negative impacts on PWUD.

Research demonstrates that drug seizures¹:

- Are associated with increased overdose risk. A 2024 literature review concluded that most research found an association between police seizure and elevated overdose risk. Studies from the US and Vancouver found an increase in overdose events following drug seizure.^{vi,vii,viii,ix}
- Prevent people from accessing life-saving services, from calling police in unsafe situations, and from calling emergency services during overdoses.^{ii,x}
- Increase harms experienced by PWUD by putting them in unsafe situations to replace their supply (e.g., drug debts, property theft, or sex work).^{i,ii,xi}
- Disproportionately impact equity seeking groups (i.e., Indigenous and other racialized groups, unhoused individuals, people engaged in sex work).^{i,ii,vi}

National Policy Landscape

In recognition of this emerging evidence, governments and organizations across Canada and globally have pursued measures to reduce the harms of criminalization and recognize substance use as a health issue. Key examples of this include:

- In 2006, Vancouver Police Department adopted a policy that provides officers with a broad range of discretion when dealing with possession of illegal drugs. The policy directs police officers to consider an individual's behaviour and risks to public safety when deciding to recommend a criminal charge.

¹ See Appendix A: Synthesis of Key Evidence on Police Drug Seizure Harms.

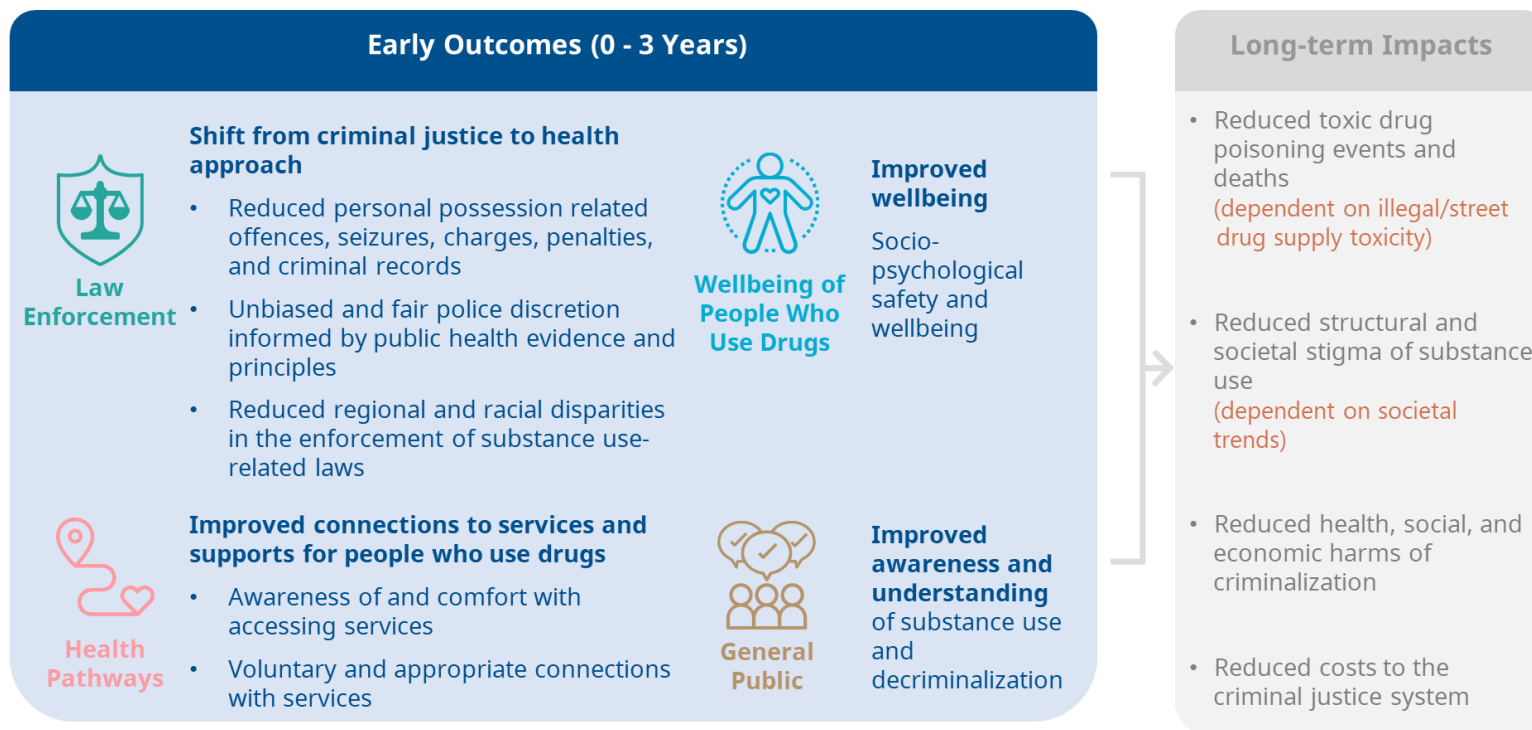
- In 2020, the Public Prosecution Service of Canada (PPSC) established Guideline 5.13 that recognizes drug possession as a health-related issue and requires prosecutors to consider alternatives to charges unless there are serious manifestations of harm (e.g., risk to the safety or wellbeing of children or young persons).
- In 2022, the Government of Canada introduced amendments to the CDSA. Under the new section 10.2, police officers must consider pre-diversion measures, including whether it would be preferable to take no further action, to warn the individual, or with consent of the individual, refer them to a program/service provider that could assist the individual when attending to an alleged simple possession offence.
- In 2023, PPSC amended guideline 2.3 ("Decision to Prosecute") to increase consideration of the background and personal circumstances of the Accused in the determination of whether it is in the public interest to prosecute. These factors include Indigenous identity, membership in a racialized or marginalized community, homelessness, poverty and substance-use disorder.

Decriminalization in BC aligns with these broader national trends. It aims to shift PWUD away from the criminal justice system and towards health and social supports.

Intended Early Outcomes

Within the initial three-year exemption period, BC is monitoring four key dimensions of early outcomes:

• Law enforcement	Decriminalization aims to shift PWUDs away from the criminal justice system towards health and social services. Key metrics for monitoring and evaluation include personal possession related offences, drug seizures, and charges.
• Wellbeing of people who use drugs	Decriminalization aims to improve the wellbeing of PWUD by mitigating the harms of criminalization, including formal police interactions and seizures due to personal possession.
• Health pathways	Decriminalization intends to improve connections to services and supports for PWUD. Health outcomes are medium- and long-term impacts.
• Public awareness and understanding	Decriminalization aims to raise awareness on substance use, with the goal of reducing stigma that prevents PWUD from accessing services and supports.



Evidence from other jurisdictions suggests that it takes years for many health and other outcomes to fully emerge. In Portugal, for example, following decriminalization, drug related deaths and newly diagnosed HIV infections decreased significantly over five years.²

The evolving toxicity in the illegal drug supply, primarily with fentanyl and its analogues, is the key driver of drug toxicity deaths. Between 2017 and 2024, fentanyl was detected in 79% to 87% of unregulated drug deaths in BC.³ In recent years, illegal drug toxicity has been driving drug related deaths across Canada. From 2022 to 2023, BC experienced a 5% increase and Alberta experienced a 17% increase in drug-related deaths. Both provinces have reported a decrease in drug-related deaths in the first six months of 2024.⁴

² [Drug Decriminalization In Portugal: Setting the Record Straight](#). Drug Policy Foundation, 2021.

³ [BC Coroners Service Dashboard](#)

⁴ [BCCDC Unregulated Drug Poisoning Dashboard](#) and [Alberta substance use surveillance system](#), Government of Alberta.

Current Trends in Toxic Drug Crisis in BC

The Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions (MMHA), the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC), and other partners continue to regularly monitor health outcomes and drug toxicology indicators as part of BC's overall surveillance of the toxic drug crisis. While these indicators are highly dependent on external factors (e.g., the increase in illegal drug toxicity), they provide additional context for understanding the early outcomes of decriminalization.

Health outcomes and drug toxicity indicators remain stable overall since decriminalization. As of July 2024, data shows unregulated drug deaths have decreased slightly and paramedic-attended opioid overdose events are largely unchanged.

- 2023 marked a tragic record year in unregulated drug deaths. Toxicity of illicit drugs was the driver of these deaths. There have been 1,365 deaths in the first seven months of 2024, a 9% decrease from the first seven months of 2023. Despite this slight overall decrease, deaths are increasing in some areas and among some demographic groups.⁵
- The rate of unregulated drug deaths has been stable with some fluctuations since 2021. A statistical analysis conducted by the BCCDC found that the unregulated drug death rate in the first 12 months of decriminalization (February 1, 2023, to January 31, 2024) was not statistically different from the unregulated drug death rate before decriminalization (April 1, 2020 to January 31, 2023). This analysis will be repeated when more data is available.
- The number and rates of paramedic-attended opioid overdose events remains high, with geographical variations and fluctuations year over year.⁶ In July 2024 there were 2,004 paramedic-attended opioid overdose events, a 4% decrease from 2,094 in July 2023.
- The number and rates of paramedic-attended events and unregulated drug deaths for people under 19 remain stable. There were 28 unregulated drug toxicity deaths in BC of persons younger than 19 years of age in 2023, a 22% decline from 2022 (36 deaths). In the first seven months of 2024, 11 people under the age of 19 have died from unregulated drugs.
- Average fentanyl concentration in street-level samples remains unchanged.⁷

⁵ [BC Coroners Service Dashboard](#)

⁶ [BCCDC Unregulated Drug Poisoning Dashboard](#)

⁷ [BCCSU Drug Checking Project Dashboard](#) and [SUBSTANCE](#)

2. Health Pathways

Key Findings

- As part of the implementation of decriminalization, new proactive outreach positions across regional health authorities (RHAs) and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) have been hired and are facilitating connections to services.
- Majority of service utilization indicators are stable or continue to increase since decriminalization.

Decriminalization aims to encourage connections to health and social supports by reducing stigma and fear associated with criminalization. In addition to broader investments in mental health and substance use (MHSU) services, BC has funded the creation of new decriminalization proactive outreach positions in RHAs and the FNHA. The objective of these new positions is to facilitate connections to care.

Intended early outcomes of decriminalization include increased awareness of and comfort with accessing health and social services for PWUD, and increased connections to health and social services. The health pathways metrics presented in this report relate to the utilization of low-barrier services. These services tend to be the entry point for PWUD into the broader system of MHSU services, including treatment and recovery, and so are indicative of PWUD comfort and connection with services and supports. Health outcomes are medium- to long-term impacts and are more appropriate for long-term studies.

Data in the following section suggests that core service utilization indicators are stable or increasing since decriminalization.⁸ BC will continue to monitor these indicators throughout the implementation of decriminalization.

⁸ Service utilization is impacted by factors outside decriminalization and takes time to change after an intervention. Data needs to be interpreted carefully alongside other factors, including service availability. Evaluations of decriminalization will consider all lines of evidence and analyze decriminalization's contribution to the changes.

Health System Implementation Activities – New Proactive Outreach Positions

As part of its decriminalization implementation activities, BC funded new proactive outreach positions in each RHA, as well as the FNHA, for a total of 24 full-time positions. The purpose of these positions is to support new connections to care for PWUD and liaison activities with law enforcement in communities.

RHAs have taken a range of approaches to ensure that these new positions best meet community needs.

First Nations Health Authority 5 FTEs	Vancouver Coastal Health 4 FTEs	Fraser Health 4 FTEs	Interior Health 4 FTEs	Island Health 4 FTEs	Northern Health 3 FTEs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 per FNHA Region • Virtual peer coordinators and substance use navigators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community outreach workers in local overdose outreach teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Regional outreach workers in interdisciplinary teams • 1 Coordinator to support law enforcement liaison 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RCMP liaison positions embedded in existing crisis teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 part-time and 1 full-time (3 FTEs) virtual addiction and recovery workers • 1 full-time proactive outreach nurse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social work/peer outreach workers, embedded in existing harm reduction or specialized service teams

RHAs are required to provide quantitative reporting on new connections to services facilitated by proactive outreach positions as part of their funding agreements. These metrics include:

- # of client interactions and # of unique clients served
- % of clients connected to another service
- Qualitative reporting on successes/challenges with reaching new clients and connecting them to care.

FNHA is also reporting engagement connections with community members and system partners, to reflect their unique role and the community engagement mandate of their funded positions.

Health System Implementation Activities – Proactive Outreach: Activity Highlights

Proactive outreach activities vary across each RHA and the FNHA. These new positions have taken a range of approaches to best meet their community needs.

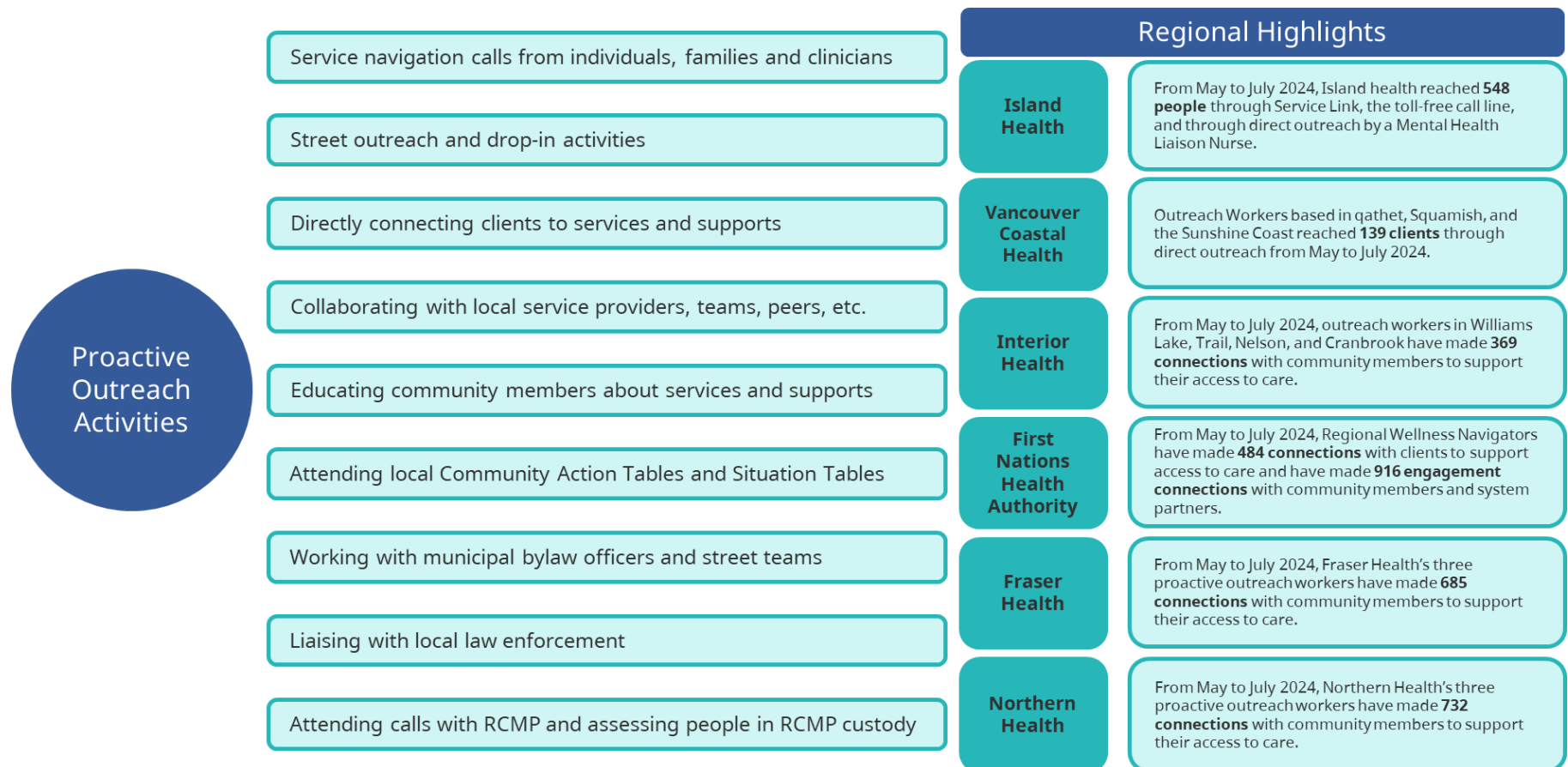


Figure 1. Proactive Outreach Activities and Regional Highlights, May 2024 – July 2024

Health Service Utilization: Visits to Overdose Prevention Sites and Supervised Consumption Sites

Overdose prevention service (OPS) and supervised consumption site (SCS) service utilization continues to trend upward since the implementation of exemption s.56. BC experienced a new high in number of visits in January 2024 with 77,927 visits.

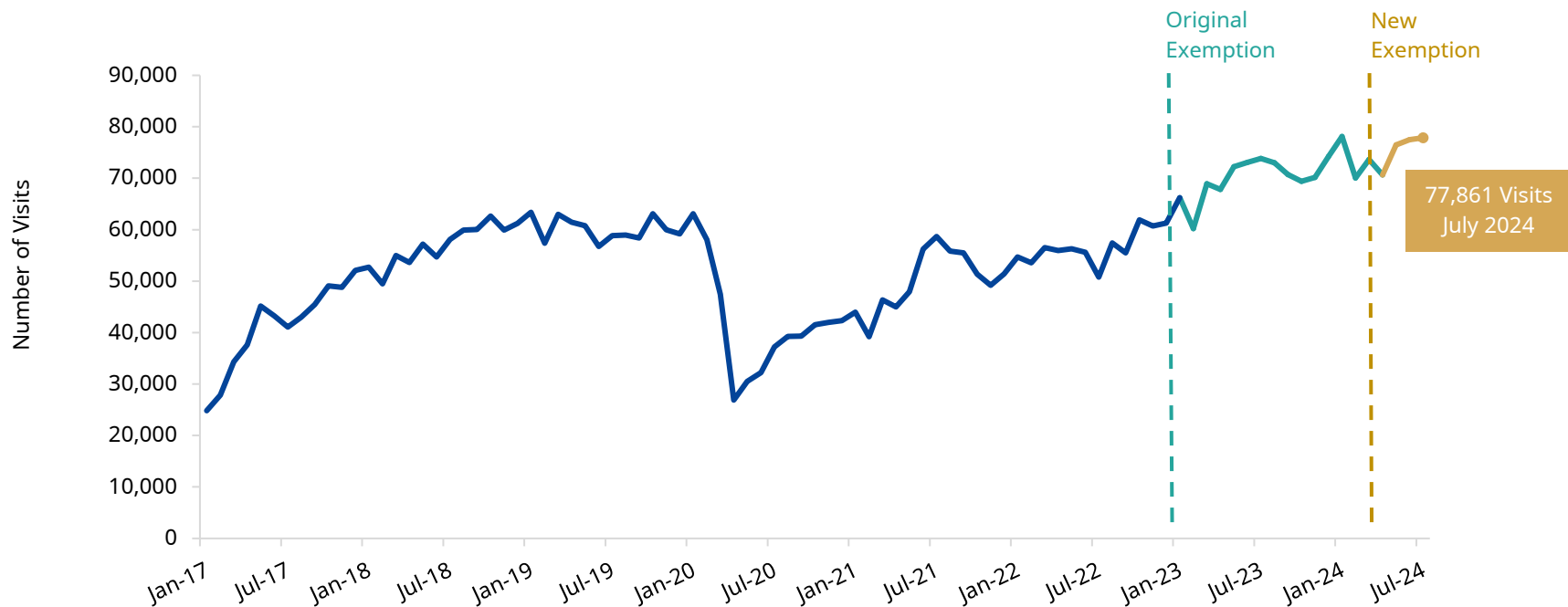


Figure 2. Visits to Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS) and Supervised Consumption Services (SCS) in BC (January 2017 - July 2024)⁹

- OPS and SCS provide life-saving services by preventing and responding to illegal drug poisonings.
- In July 2024, there were 77,861 visits to OPS and SCS in BC.
- Utilization of OPS and SCS continue to grow since the implementation of BC's original s.56 exemption, following the trend started in 2020. The trend has also continued after the implementation BC's new s.56 exemption in May 2024.

⁹ OPS/SCS visits may be limited by service availability (e.g., number of sites and hours). Numbers include both injection and inhalation OPS/SCS.

Source: <http://www.BCCDC.ca/health-professionals/data-reports/substance-use-harm-reduction-dashboard>

Health Service Utilization: Demand for Take Home Naloxone (THN)

The number of THN kits shipped to sites has increased since January 2019. In 2023, a total of 479,896 naloxone kits were shipped, a 22% increase from 2022. There are now more than 2,324 active distribution locations for THN kits in BC.

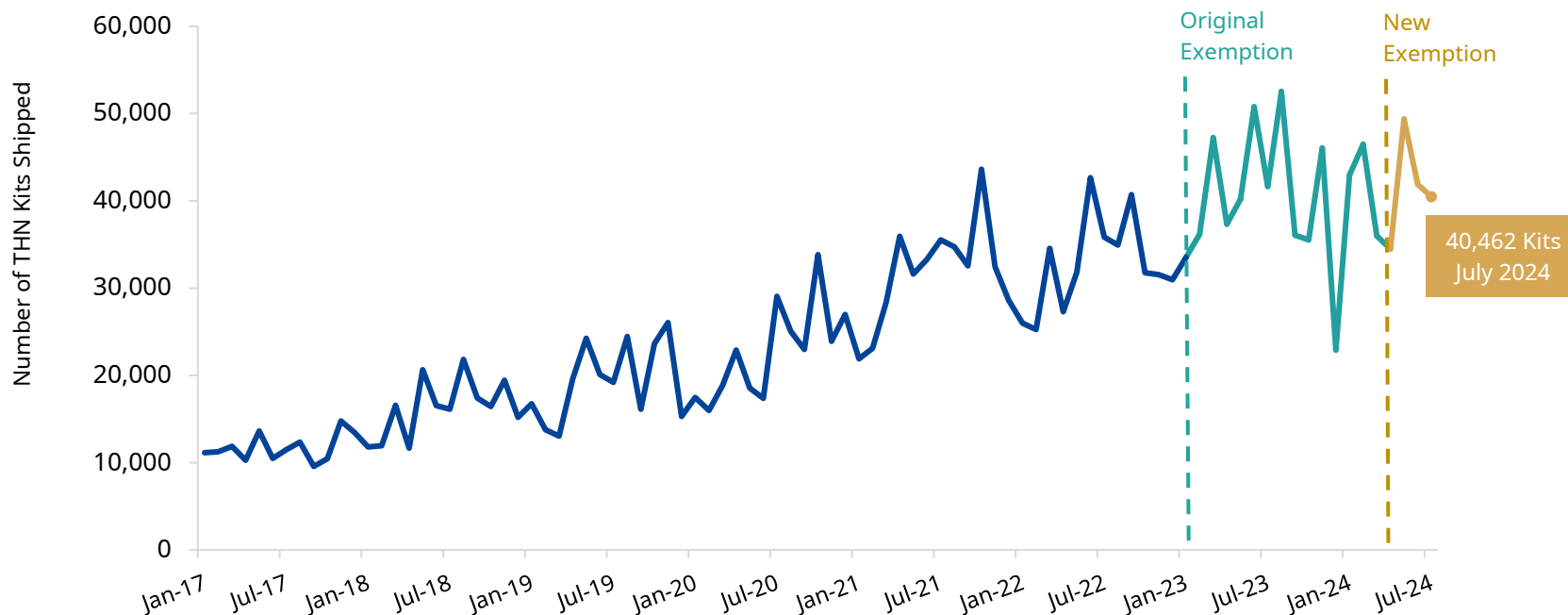


Figure 3. Number of THN kits shipped to sites (January 2015 –July 2024)¹⁰

- BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) started the THN program in 2012 to provide training and kits to people at risk of an opioid overdose.
- In July 2024, 40,462 kits were shipped and there were 2,324 take home naloxone sites across BC.
- The number of THN kits shipped has continued to increase after the implementation of the s.56 exemption.

¹⁰ Month-to-month variation of demand is expected due to the different number of processing dates, certain sites ordering for more than one month's supply each time, drug alerts, and other factors. Source: <http://www.BCCDC.ca/health-professionals/data-reports/substance-use-harm-reduction-dashboard>

Health Service Utilization: Opioid Agonist Treatment (OAT) Uptake

The number of people receiving OAT has remained steady since the implementation of exemption s.56.

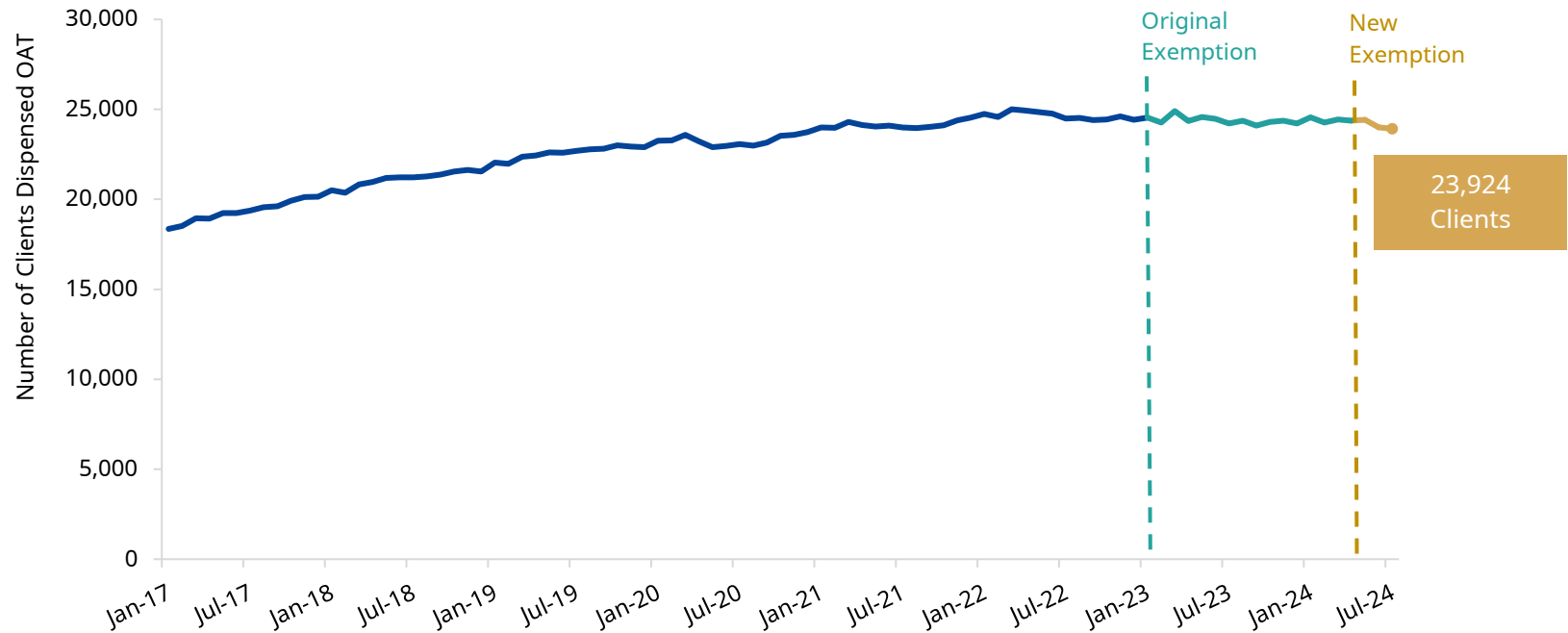


Figure 4. Number of people receiving OAT by month (January 2015 – July 2024)¹¹

- Opioid Agonist Treatment (OAT) is a medication-based treatment for people with opioid use disorder.
- In July 2024, there were 23,924 OAT clients in BC.
- The number of OAT clients remain stable since the implementation of BC's s.56 exemption.

¹¹ BC PharmaNet data are provided by Health Sector Information, Analysis, and Reporting Division, BC Ministry of Health. Data represent clients who filled prescriptions at community pharmacies within BC, not all clients who received prescriptions. Recent data may change slightly due to prescription reversals/data quality improvements. Source: <http://www.BCCDC.ca/health-professionals/data-reports/substance-use-harm-reduction-dashboard>

Health Service Utilization: Drug Checking Utilization

The number of drug samples tested in BC has increased since 2019. In July 2024, BC tested 4,143 samples.

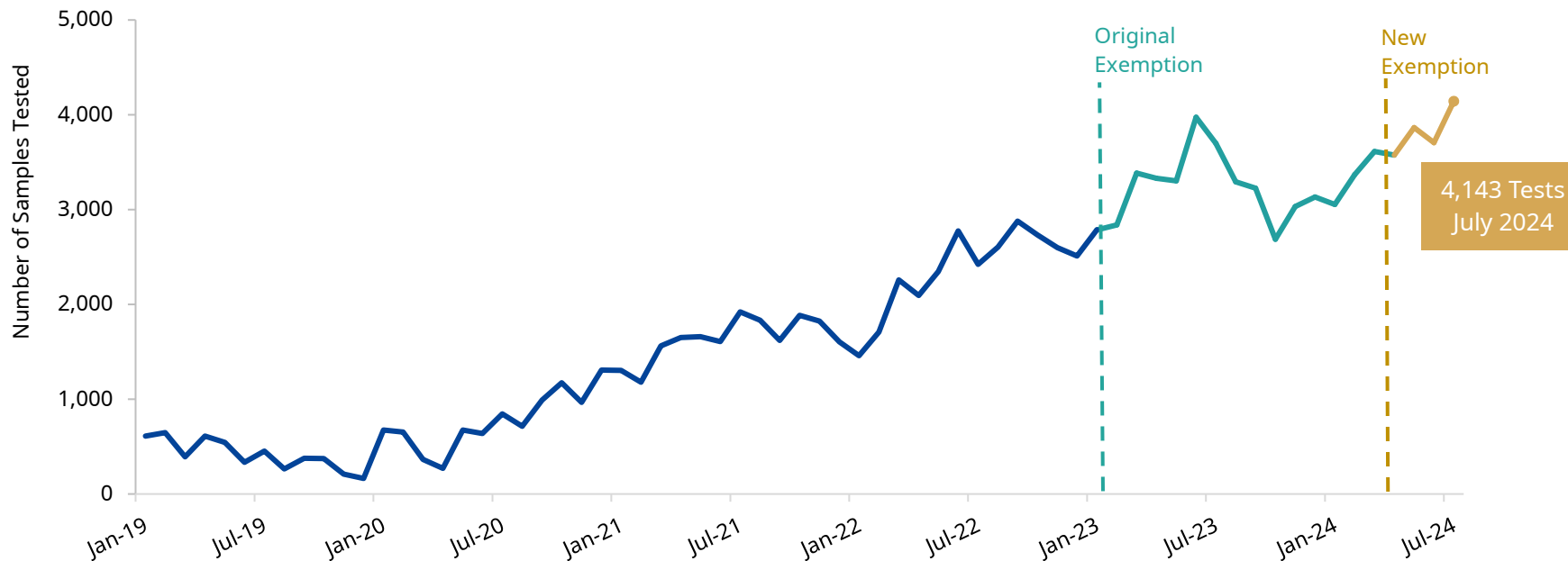


Figure 5. Number of samples tested using FTIR spectroscopy at drug checking locations in BC (January 2019 – July 2024)

- Drug checking using Fourier-transform infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy is a harm reduction service that allows people to check what is in their drugs; there are currently 23 FTIRs available in BC.
- There are 119 locations around the province where one can drop off a drug sample for analysis, 57 of which offer immediate point-of care testing.
- The number of drug samples tested in BC vary according to service capacity (e.g., number of access points, staffing and hours).¹²

¹² In October 2023, technician shortage in certain high-volume sites disrupted service availability. Service capacity has since returned. Source: [BC Centre on Substance Use \(BCCSU\) drug checking reports](#) and [Vancouver Island Drug Checking project reports \(SUBSTANCE\)](#). Vancouver Island Drug Checking Project reporting does not start until September 2020.

3. Law Enforcement

Key Findings

- Possession offences and drug seizures under 2.5g gradually decreased from 2019 to 2022, and to a much greater extent during BC's original s.56 exemption.
- BC's new s.56 exemption prohibits possession of illegal drugs in public spaces. Early data shows that possession-related offences and drug seizures have increased since the new exemption.
- Possession-related offences and drug seizures are higher in the first three months of the new s.56 exemption (May – July 2024) than during the original s.56 exemption period (February 2023 – April 2024), but lower than baseline (2019-2022) levels:
 - There were 1,349 possession offences in May - July 2024 (new exemption), which is 131% higher than the May-July 2023 level (original exemption) and 19% lower than the May-July 2022 level (pre-decriminalization).
 - There were 130 possession drug seizures under 2.5g in May - July 2024 (new exemption), which is 491% higher than May-July 2023 levels (original exemption) and 71% lower than May-July 2022 levels (pre-decriminalization).
 - There were 475 total possession drug seizures, regardless of weight, in May - July 2024 (new exemption), which is 164% higher than May-July 2023 level (original exemption) and 43% lower than May-July 2022 level (pre-decriminalization).
- Additional data elements/variables are being explored with law enforcement analysts to determine if they can be used to identify locations outside of the scope and conditions of the exemptions where police are managing possession offences and seizures.

Decriminalization aims to shift PWUD away from the criminal justice system and towards health and social supports. From 2019 to 2022, the number of simple possession charges recommended by police in BC declined by 87% (Table 11). According to BC Corrections data (Table 14 and Table 15), in 2023, less than 1% of community corrections clients and 0% in provincial custody were for drug possession as the most serious offence. As such, selected core metrics in this report will focus on other forms of criminalization in policing, including personal possession related offences, defined as formal police interactions, and drug seizures.

Possession Offences in Canada

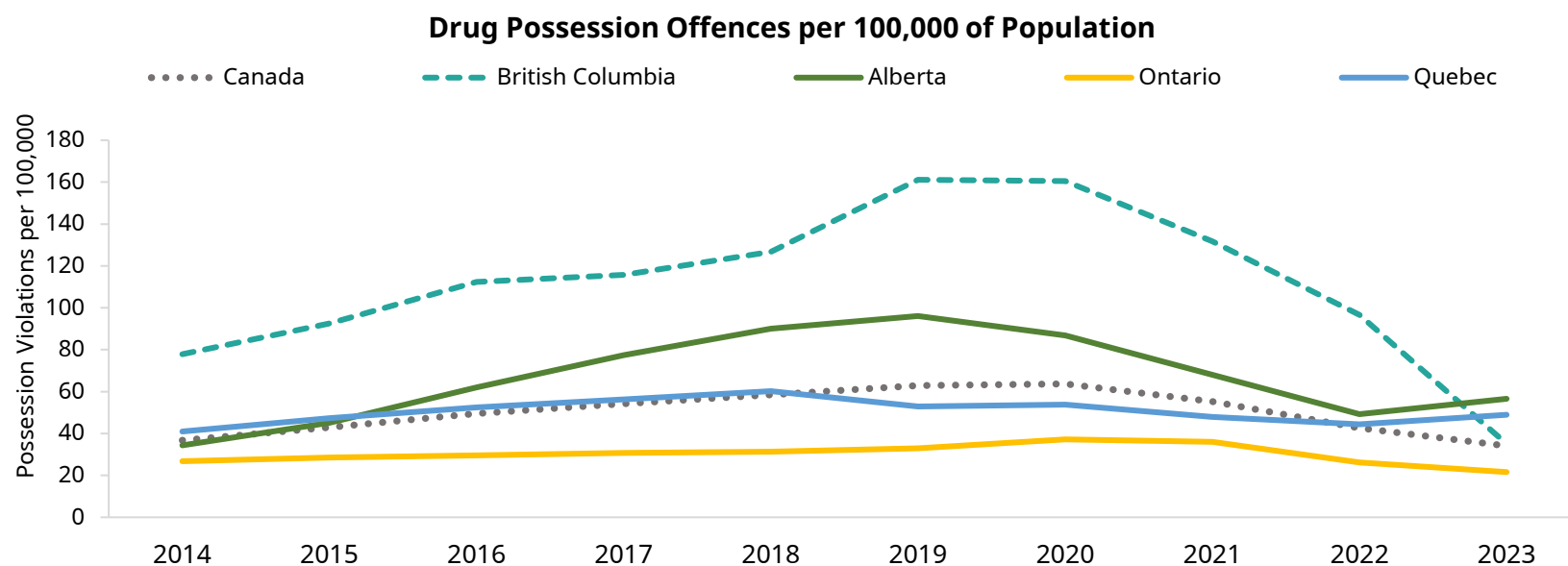


Figure 5. Rate of possession violations/offences (per 100,000 population) of other CDSA substances, 2014 – 2023

According to Statistics Canada, BC had the highest CDSA personal possession offence rate (not including *Cannabis Act*, trafficking, production, and distribution offences)¹³ among Canadian provinces (not including the territories) from at least 2014 until 2022 (Figure 5). BC’s CDSA personal possession offence rate of certain s.56 exemption eligible substances began decreasing in 2020 and was at the same level as the national average by 2023. Statistics Canada suggests that the decrease may be due to changes in policing practices and the introduction of BC’s s.56 exemption from the CDSA on January 31, 2023.¹⁴

¹³ The Statistics Canada category is similar to the possession offence reported in MMHA quarterly data report. The category includes substances not covered by the s.56 exemption and excludes cocaine.

¹⁴ Statistics Canada. [Table 35-10-0177-01 Incident-based crime statistics, by detailed violations, Canada, provinces, territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Canadian Forces Military Police](#). Accessed: 2024-10-03

The following section provides an overview of key law enforcement metrics that capture progress towards decriminalization's objectives. Data from this section is derived from BC's Police Records Information Management Environment (PRIME-BC).

Regional analysis is based on health authority regions to align with public health reporting. Please note that it is not comparable to the previous reporting by RCMP policing districts. Other forms of regional analyses (including urban versus remote) are under consideration as new data are made available to MMHA.

Law Enforcement Data – Analysis Methodology

BC is monitoring key law enforcement metrics that indicate progress towards decriminalization's objectives:

- **Offences**

Offences are police recorded suspected violations of the CDSA. They represent formal police interactions and/or investigations that occur when police suspect there is a crime being committed. An offence may or may not involve an arrest and does not mean that there is a charge or a conviction. In BC, police decide after their investigation if there is sufficient evidence to recommend Crown counsel to charge a suspect. Their recommendation informs a report to Crown counsel (RCC).

Offences are recorded in PRIME-BC. When police respond to, or initiate, a call for service, a file is generated in PRIME-BC and assigned a code from the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) to describe the crimes associated with the call for service.¹⁵

There are two groups of UCR codes relating to the CDSA relevant to the monitoring and evaluation of decriminalization:



- Possession
 - CDSA incidents involving personal possession (section 4(1))



- Trafficking
 - CDSA incidents involving possession for the purpose of trafficking (section 5(2))
 - CDSA incidents involving trafficking of illegal drugs (section 5(1))

BC is monitoring relevant files in PRIME-BC to determine the number of CDSA offences. For incidents associated with possession, BC monitors both incidents where possession is the most serious offence (MSO) and incidents where

¹⁵ The Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) was designed by Statistics Canada to measure the incidence of crime and its characteristics. An offence is used as a unit of count for the purposes of the statistical reporting.

possession is not the MSO but a secondary offence.¹⁶ This report focuses on incidents where possession is the MSO as it most accurately captures interactions/investigations initiated by a simple possession offence.

This report refers to incidents where possession is the MSO as “possession offences” and incidents where trafficking is the MSO as “trafficking offences.” Information on whether drugs are seized during a call for service are also recorded in PRIME-BC. Other recorded details include (if available) drug type and amount for each type of drug seized.

Possession offences include specific UCR codes police officers use to describe the perceived types of substances involved. The codes, however, are broad and do not exactly align with the types of substances exempted as part of BC’s s.56 exemption. Using this information, analysts are able to classify offence into three categories: (1) offences involving *only* s.56 exemption eligible substances (opioids, cocaine, methamphetamine or MDMA, as set out in the Annex to the s.56 exemption), (2) offences involving *both* s.56 exemption eligible substances and non-s.56 exemption eligible substances, and (3) offences involving *only* non-s.56 exemption eligible substances. For reporting clarity, analysts group category (1) and category (2) into a new category (4) offences involving, at minimum, s.56 exemption eligible substances.¹⁷

- **Drug Seizures**

Some offences may involve the confiscation of drugs (“drug seizures”) from an individual. Drug seizures can cause harm to PWUD.¹⁸ Under certain circumstances, possession of certain illegal drugs under a cumulative weight of 2.5g is currently exempted from the CDSA, including drug seizure. Possession over the 2.5g threshold, as well as trafficking, regardless of the location or amount of drugs involved, remains illegal.

To effectively monitor the implementation of decriminalization, it is essential to calculate the *cumulative total amount* of exempted substances in each seizure incident due to the cumulative nature of the threshold policy. In a CDSA offence, multiple seizure records can be associated with the same offence file because each type of drugs seized and

¹⁶ When there are two or more violations of the law in a single incident, the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey specifies that “the most serious offence” is published for the purposes of statistical reporting. For example, violent offences (e.g. assault) are more serious than non-violent offense (e.g. CDSA violations).

¹⁷ Data analysts from VPD and RCMP analyzed a sample of possession offence files identified as having *primarily* s.56 offences and found that approximately 80% of the files contained only s.56 exemption eligible substances.

¹⁸ See Appendix A: Synthesis of Key Evidence for a synthesis of key evidence on the harms associated with the criminalization of substance use.

each packaged item seized are recorded as separate records (e.g., as property items). MMHA collaborated with its policing partners to develop a methodology of offence-based drug seizure analysis where all seizure records related to an offence are aggregated to calculate the cumulative weight of exempted substances seized in each offence. This methodology better represents the total amount of exempted drugs held by individual(s) in each offence and enables quality monitoring on the implementation and outcomes of decriminalization.¹⁹

BC is monitoring this cumulative seizure dataset to determine the number of drug seizure incidents initiated by a CDSA offence. For this report, drug seizure incidents where possession is the MSO are called “possession seizures” while drug seizure incidents where trafficking is the MSO are called “trafficking seizures.”

- **Recommended Charges**

After an investigation and review of available evidence, police in BC may recommend to the Crown Counsel to charge an individual for a specific crime. Crown counsel may choose to accept or decline police recommendations based upon their review of evidence and prosecution guidelines.

Policing partners have recommended assessing charge data on an annual basis. Monitoring recommended charges on a quarterly basis is unreliable as investigations take time to result in charges.²⁰

PRIME-BC is a live case management environment that updates as investigations are being completed. As such, coding for some offences could change between possession and trafficking as investigations progress. Further, some privatized files may become available or vice versa.

Police-reported crime statistics are released by Statistics Canada on a routine and scheduled basis. Metrics in this report are only intended to satisfy the requirement under BC’s section 56(1) CDSA exemption. The offence data presented in this report is not considered completed and may be subject to changes in UCR classification. Changes to numbers are expected, especially for recent reporting periods.

¹⁹ Previous seizure datasets relied on seizure records as a unit of analysis and therefore, did not provide detailed information on the cumulative total quantity held by the individual(s) involved.

²⁰ See Table 11. Number of Offences, Seizure incidents involving exempted drugs (regardless of amount), and Recommended Charges, where possession is the most serious offence, by all police in BC (2019 – 2023) for data on recommended charges.

Limitations

In practice, formal police interactions/investigations involving possession for trafficking are sometimes coded as possession until further investigations are completed. This means that the number of possession offences could overestimate the number of actual possession incidents. As investigations are completed, minor updates to the data will be reflected in future reporting.

Possession Offences

Possession offences gradually decreased from 2019 to 2022, and to a much greater extent during BC’s original s.56 exemption. Since the new s.56 exemption (effective May 7, 2024), offences have increased.²¹

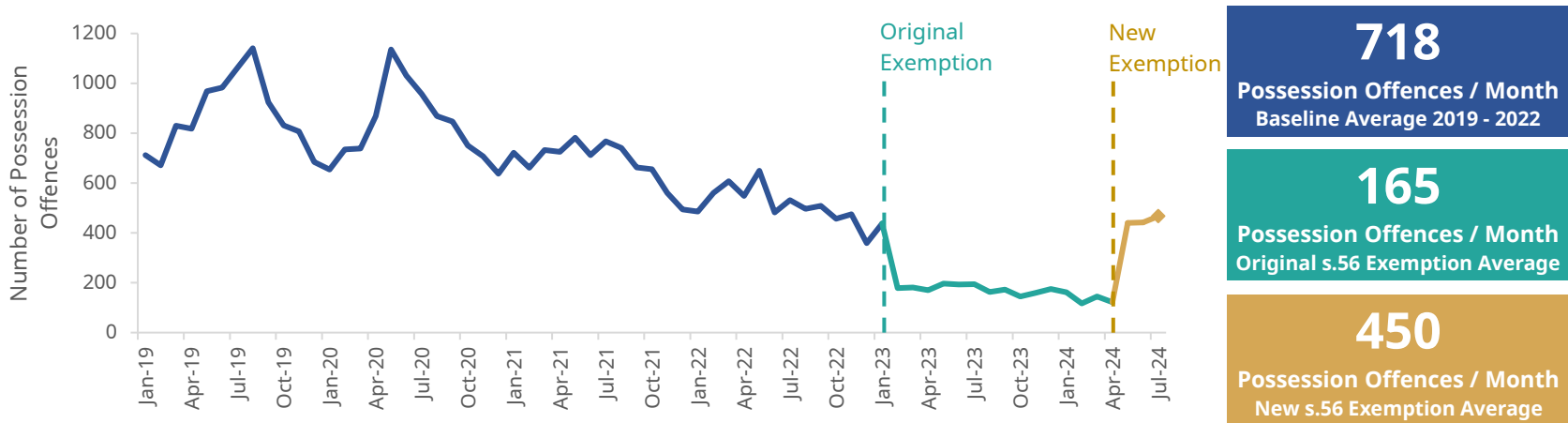


Figure 6. Number of offences, where possession is the most serious offence, by all police in BC (January 2019 – July 2024)^{22,23}

- Effective May 7, 2024, possession of any amount of illegal substances in public spaces is prohibited in BC.
- In the first 3 months of BC’s new s.56 exemption (May – July, 2024), there were an average of 450 possession offences per month. Approximately 272 unique persons per month were involved in a possession offence during this period.²³
- For reference, the baseline average (January 2019 – January 2023) is 718 possession offences per month, and the original exemption period average (Feb 2023 – April 2024) is 165 possession offences per month.
- 69% (n = 931) of possession offences in May - July 2024 involved, at minimum, a s.56 exemption eligible substances.

²¹ “Original exemption” refers to BC’s s.56 exemption in place from January 31, 2023 to May 6, 2024. “New exemption” refers to BC’s s.56 exemption that came into effect on May 7, 2024.

²² An offence represents a formal police interaction or investigation based on a particular type of suspected crime. An offence may or may not involve an arrest. It is not a charge nor a conviction.

²³ Due to the methodology of accounting for unique persons in possession offence files between the RCMP and municipal police, some unique persons may be double-counted and therefore overestimated.

There were 1,349 possession offences in May - July 2024, which is 131% higher than the May-July 2023 level (original exemption) and 19% lower than the May-July 2022 level (pre-decriminalization).

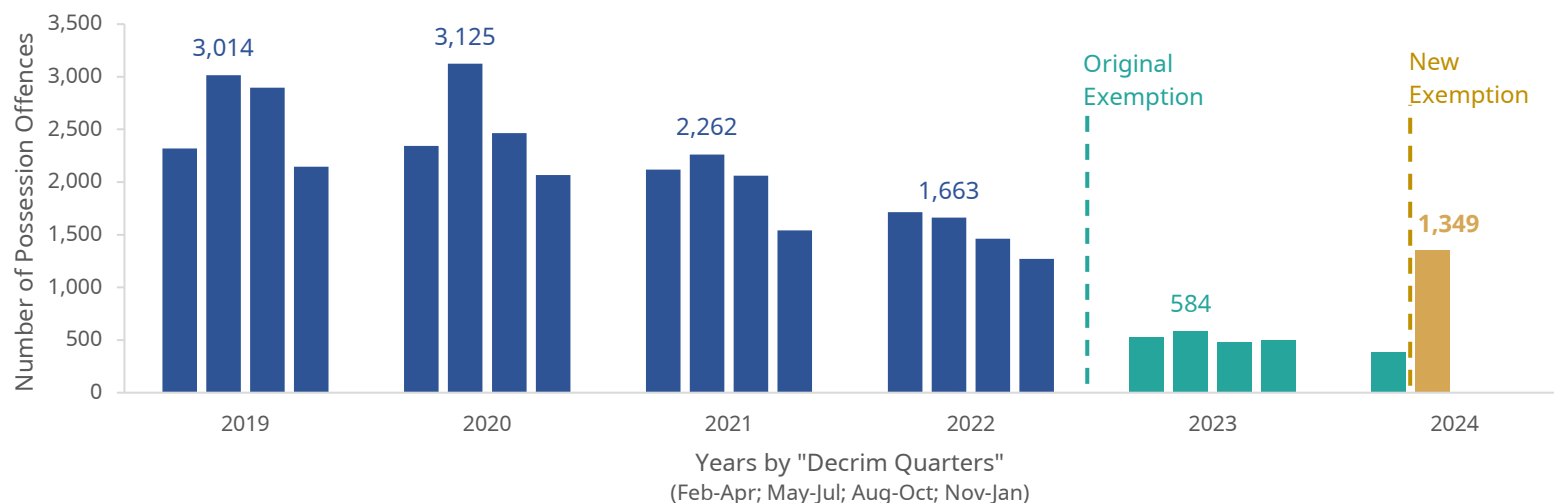


Figure 7. Offences per “Decrim Quarter”, where possession is the most serious offence, by all police in BC (February 2019 – July 2024)^{24,25,26}

- Effective May 7, 2024, possession of any amount of illegal substances in public spaces is prohibited in BC.
- There were 1,349 possession offences between May – July 2024 in B.C., which is 131% higher than May-July 2023 level, 19% lower than May-July 2022 level and 46% lower than the baseline average (May-July 2019-2022).

²⁴ “Original exemption” refers to BC’s s.56 exemption in place from January 31, 2023 to May 6, 2024. “New exemption” refers to BC’s s.56 exemption that came into effect on May 7, 2024.

²⁵ An offence represents a formal police interaction or investigation based on a particular type of suspected crime. An offence may or may not involve an arrest. It is not a charge nor a conviction.

²⁶ “Decrim Quarters” refer to Feb-Apr, May-Jul, Aug-Oct, Nov-Jan. These quarters enable ease of analysis and align with when the original s.56 exemption came into effect on January 31, 2023.

Possession Offence per 100,000 Residents Over Time, by Health Authority Region

After the implementation of the original s.56 exemption, rates of possession offence decreased significantly in all health authority regions of BC.

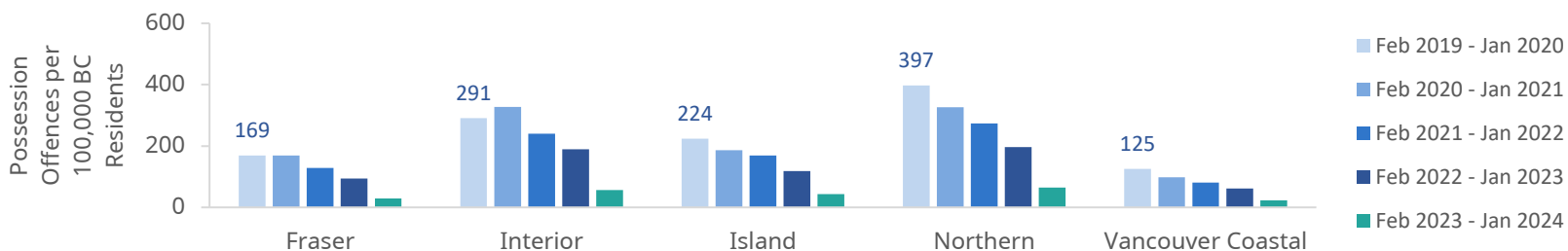


Figure 8. Offences per 100,000 BC residents, where possession is the most serious offence, by health authority region (February 2019 – January 2024)^{27,28,29}

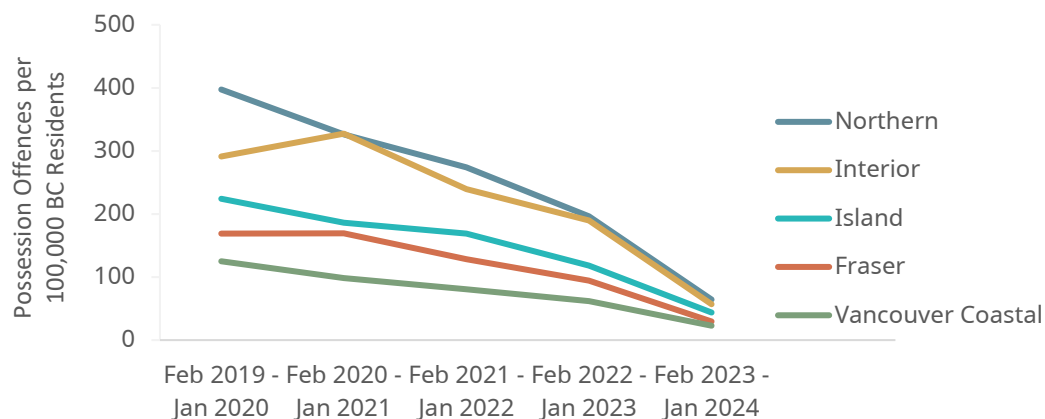
- February - July 2024 counts are not included in rate calculations, which are done annually. This analysis will be updated when full year’s data is available.
- Northern and Interior health authority regions have had the highest rates of possession offence per 100,000 residents before and after the first year of the original s.56 exemption.
- In the first year of the original s.56 exemption, the provincial rate of possession offence was 36.6 per 100,000 residents, 67% less than in 2022.
- Rates of possession offences decreased in all BC health authority regions after the implementation of the original s.56 exemption. Rates will be updated when more data are available.

²⁷ Rates for Island and Vancouver Coastal have changed from previous reporting. Previous reporting misclassified a police detachment belonging to Island health authority region as being a part of Vancouver Coastal.

²⁸ Rates were calculated using population estimates from BC Stats: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/statistics/people-population-community/population/population-estimates>.

²⁹ Rates do not include St’at’imx Tribal Police, RCMP Highway Patrol, RCMP District and E-Division Units, RCMP Combined Forces Special Enforcement Units, RCMP West Coast Marine Detachment, and RCMP Integrated Homicide Investigation Team.

The difference in population adjusted possession offence rates between regions have been gradually reducing and to a greater extent after the introduction of the original s.56 exemption.



	High-Low Line/Range	Ratio
Feb 2019 - Jan 2020	272	3.18
Feb 2020 - Jan 2021	229	3.34
Feb 2021 - Jan 2022	193	3.39
Feb 2022 - Jan 2023	135	3.18
Feb 2023 - Jan 2024	42	2.82

Figure 9. Offences per 100,000 BC residents, where possession is the most serious offence, by health authority region (February 2019 – January 2024)^{30,31,32}

- The range reflects the difference in possession offence rates between the regions with the highest and the lowest rates per year. This shows the greatest discrepancy across health authority regions.
- The difference between Vancouver Coastal and the Northern health authority regions decreased 85% between 2019 and 2023.
- The difference in possession offence rates between regions has been gradually reducing from 2019 to 2022 and to a greater extent since BC’s original s.56 exemption.

³⁰ High-low range and ratio calculations changed from previous reporting. Previous reporting misclassified a police detachment belonging to Island health authority region as being a part of Vancouver Coastal.

³¹ Rates were calculated using population estimates from BC Stats: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/statistics/people-population-community/population/population-estimates>.

³² Rates do not include St’at’imx Tribal Police, RCMP Highway Patrol, RCMP District and E-Division Units, RCMP Combined Forces Special Enforcement Units, RCMP West Coast Marine Detachment, and RCMP Integrated Homicide Investigation Team.

Drug Seizures below the Threshold (2.5g) due to Possession of Exempted Substances

Possession seizure under 2.5g of exempted drugs gradually decreased from 2019 to 2022 and to a much greater extent during the original s.56 exemption. Since the new s.56 exemption (effective May 7, 2024), possession seizures below 2.5g have increased.^{33,34}

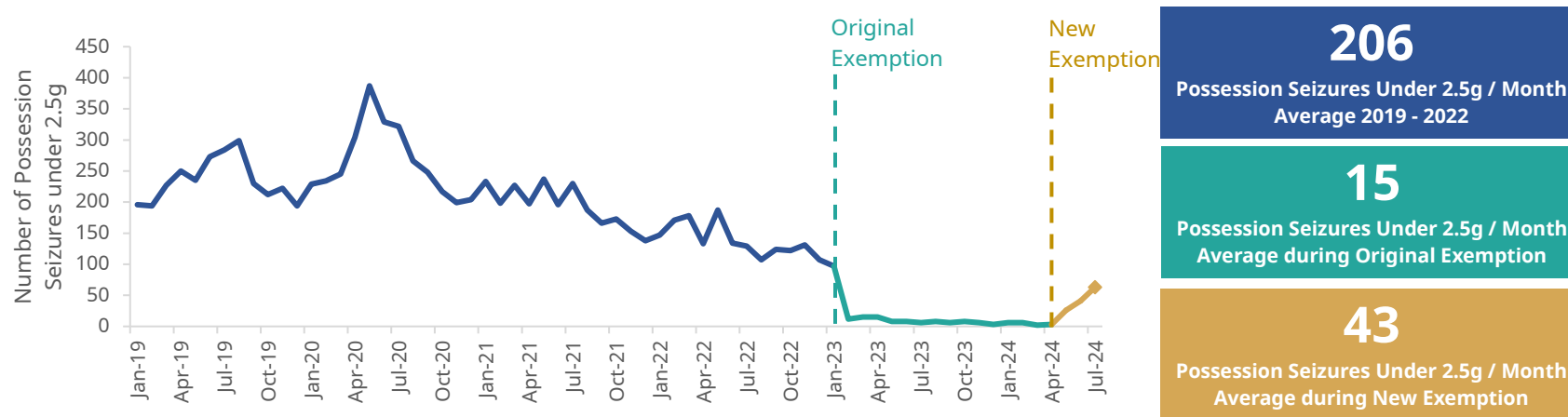


Figure 10. Seizure incidents involving exempted drugs, under 2.5g, where possession is the most serious offence, by all police in BC (January 2019 – July 2024)³⁵

- Effective May 7, 2024, possession of any amount of illegal substances in public spaces is prohibited in BC.
- In the first 3 months of BC’s new s.56 exemption (May – July, 2024), there were an average of 43 possession seizures of amounts under 2.5g per month. For reference, the baseline average (January 2019 – January 2023) is 206 per month, and the original exemption period average (Feb 2023 – April 2024) is 15 per month.

³³ “Original exemption” refers to BC’s s.56 exemption in place from January 31, 2023 to May 6, 2024. “New exemption” refers to BC’s s.56 exemption that came into effect on May 7, 2024.

³⁴ Possession drug seizures are drug seizures made by police where the most serious offence on record is simple possession. Number of drug seizures do not include amounts that were unquantifiable (i.e., no weight on record).

³⁵ The seizure amount in this dataset represents the cumulative total amount of exempted drugs seized.

There were 130 possession drug seizures under 2.5g in May - July 2024, which is 491% higher (n=22) than May-July 2023 levels (original exemption) and 71% lower (n=450) than May-July 2022 levels (pre-decriminalization).³⁶

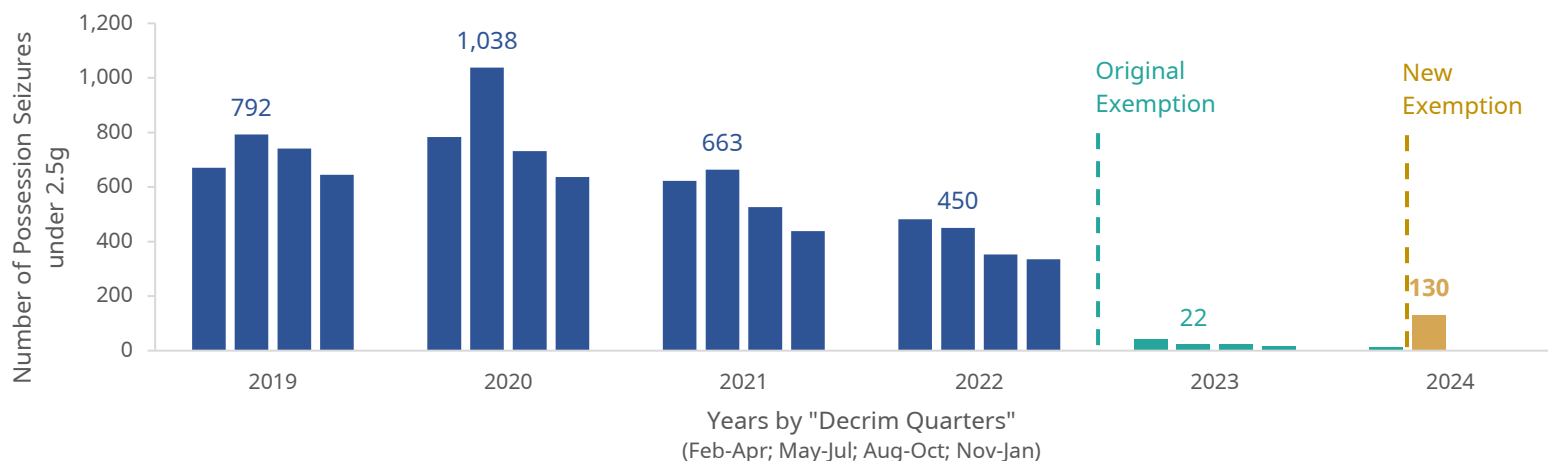


Figure 11. Seizure incidents involving exempted drugs per “Decrim Quarter”, under 2.5g, where possession is the most serious offence, by all police in BC (February 2019 – July 2024)^{37,38,39}

- Effective May 7, 2024, possession of any amount of illegal substances in public spaces is prohibited in BC.
- There were 123 possession drug seizures under 2.5g during the first three months of BC’s new s.56 exemption (May – July 2024), which is 491% higher than May-July 2023 level, 73% lower than May-July 2022 level and 82% lower than the baseline average (May-July, 2019-2022).

³⁶ Possession drug seizures are drug seizures made by police where the most serious offence on record is simple possession. Number of drug seizures do not include amounts that were unquantifiable (i.e., no weight on record).

³⁷ “Original exemption” refers to BC’s s.56 exemption in place from January 31, 2023 to May 6, 2024. “New exemption” refers to BC’s s.56 exemption that came into effect on May 7, 2024.

³⁸ The seizure amount in this dataset represents the cumulative total amount of exempted drugs seized.

³⁹ On May 7, 2024, a new exemption replaced the original one. The next decrim quarter May-July 2024 will provide information about the new exemption, which restricted the scope of places where possession is permitted.

Drug Seizure, Regardless of Weight, Due to Possession of Exempted Substances

Possession seizure incidents of exempted drugs, regardless of weight, gradually decreased from 2019 to 2022 and to much greater extent during BC’s original s.56 exemption.^{40,41} Since the new s.56 exemption (effective May 7, 2024), overall possession seizures have increased.

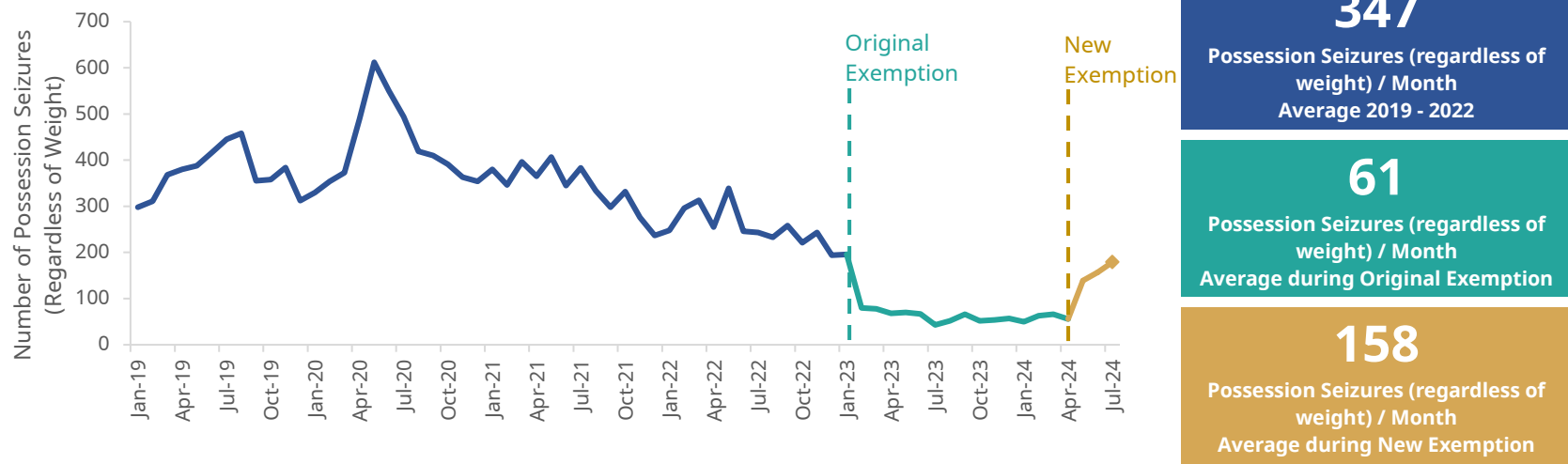


Figure 12. Seizure incidents involving exempted drugs, where possession is the most serious offence, by all police in BC (January 2019 – July 2024)

- Effective May 7, 2024, possession of any amount of illegal substances in public spaces is prohibited in BC.
- In the first three months of BC’s new s.56 exemption, there were an average of 158 possession seizures (regardless of weight) per month. For reference, the baseline average (January 2019 – January 2023) is 347 per month, and the original exemption period average (Feb 2023 – April 2024) is 61 per month.

⁴⁰ “Original exemption” refers to BC’s s.56 exemption in place from January 31, 2023 to May 6, 2024. “New exemption” refers to BC’s s.56 exemption that came into effect on May 7, 2024.

⁴¹ Possession drug seizures are drug seizures made by police where the most serious offence on record is simple possession. Number of drug seizures do not include amounts that were unquantifiable (i.e., no weight on record).

There were 475 total possession drug seizures, regardless of weight, in May - July 2024, which is 164% higher (n=180) than May-July 2023 level (original exemption) and 43% lower (n=828) than May-July 2022 level (pre-decriminalization).⁴²

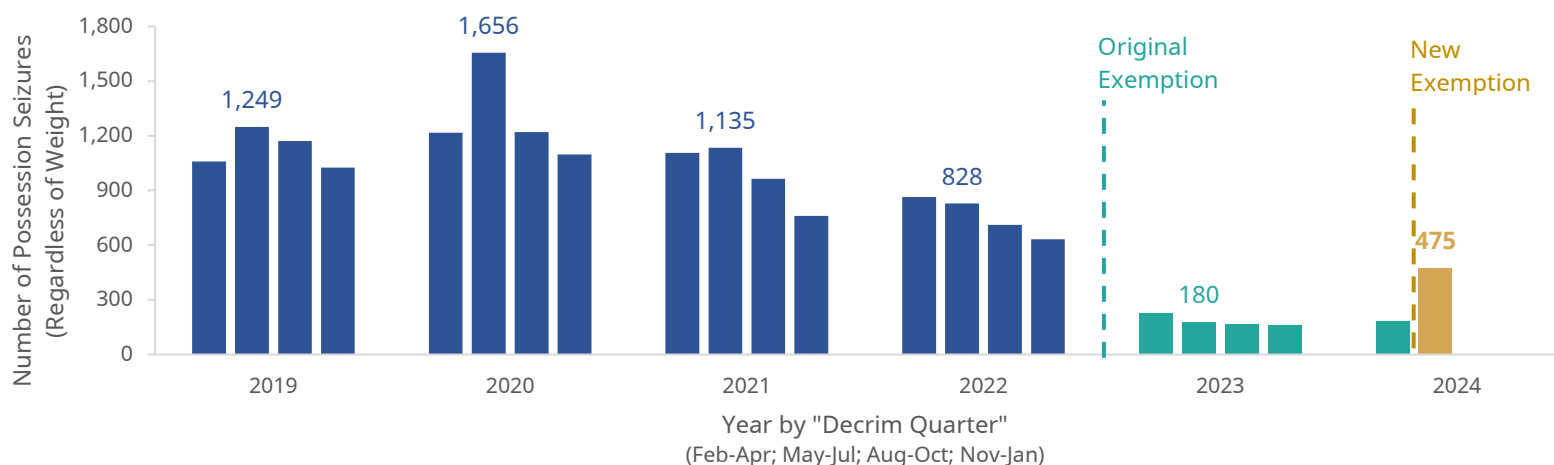


Figure 13. Seizure incidents involving exempted drugs per “Decrim Quarter”, where possession is the most serious offence, by all police in BC (February 2019 – July 2024)^{43,44}

- Effective May 7, 2024, possession of any amount of illegal substances in public spaces is prohibited in BC.
- There were 475 possession drug seizures, regardless of weight, during the first three months of BC’s new s.56 exemption (May – July 2024), which is 164% higher than May-July 2023 level, 43% lower than May-July 2022 levels, and 61% lower than baseline average (May-July, 2019-2022).

⁴² Possession drug seizures are drug seizures made by police where the most serious offence on record is simple possession. Number of drug seizures do not include amounts that were unquantifiable (i.e., no weight on record).

⁴³ “Original exemption” refers to BC’s s.56 exemption in place from January 31, 2023 to May 6, 2024. “New exemption” refers to BC’s s.56 exemption that came into effect on May 7, 2024.

⁴⁴ Decrim quarters refer to Feb-Apr, May-Jul, Aug-Oct, Nov-Jan. These quarters enable ease of analysis and align with when decriminalization came into effect on January 31, 2023.

Possession Seizures by Weight Range

The dominant weight range for possession seizures shifted from 0.01-2.5g before decriminalization to >10.0g after the implementation of BC’s original s.56 exemption. Since the new s.56 exemption, 33% of measurable possession seizure incidents were under 2.5g, and 45% were over 10g.⁴⁵

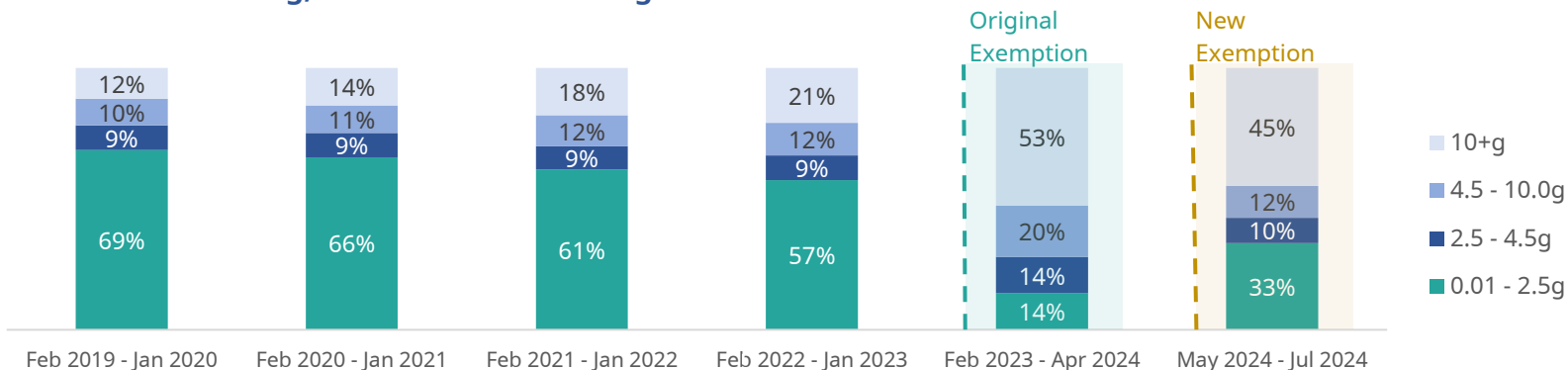


Figure 14. Proportion of seizure incidents involving exempted drugs, in various cumulative weight ranges, where possession is the most serious offence, by all police in BC (February 2019 – July 2024)^{46,47}

- During the original s.56 exemption period (February 2023 – April 2024), 14% of measurable possession seizure incidents were under 2.5g, and 53% were over 10.0g.
- The median amount seized for a possession offence was 1.90g in Feb 2022 - Jan 2023 (pre-implementation) and shifted to 10.10g in Feb 2023 – Jan 2024 (first year of original exemption). See Table 9 for more information on annual statistics.
- Effective May 7, 2024, possession of illegal substances in public spaces is prohibited in BC.
- In the first 3 months of the new s.56 exemption (May – July 2024), 33% of measurable possession seizure incidents were under 2.5g, and 45% were over 10.0g.

⁴⁵ Possession drug seizures are drug seizures made by police where the most serious offence on record is simple possession.

⁴⁶ “Original exemption” refers to BC’s s.56 exemption in place from January 31, 2023 to May 6, 2024. “New exemption” refers to BC’s s.56 exemption that came into effect on May 7, 2024.

⁴⁷ The seizure amount in this dataset represents the cumulative total amount of exempted drugs seized. Incidents with no recorded weights are not included in this figure.

Possession Seizures per 100,000 residents, Regardless of Amount, Over Time, by Health Authority Region

After the implementation of BC's original s.56 exemption, rates of possession seizures have decreased in all regions of BC.⁴⁸

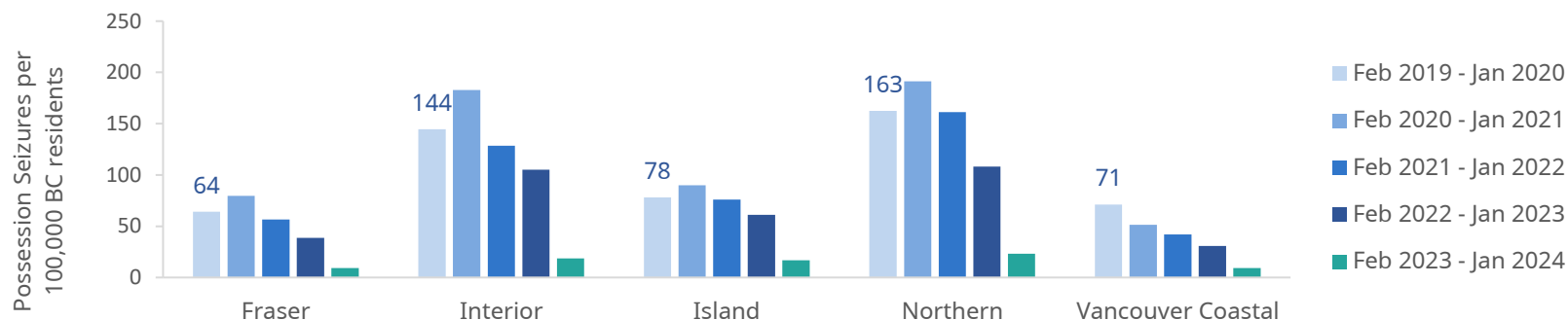


Figure 15. Seizure incidents involving exempted drugs, regardless of amount, per 100,000 BC residents, where possession is the most serious offence, by health authority region (February 2019 – January 2024)^{49,50}

- February – July 2024 counts are not included in rate calculations, which are done annually. This analysis will be updated when full year's data is available.
- Northern and Interior health authority regions had the highest rates of possession seizures per 100,000 residents before and after the implementation of the original s.56 exemption.
- Rates of possession seizure decreased in February 2023 – January 2024 in all health authority regions of BC after the implementation of the original s.56 exemption.
- Table 10 presents rates of possession seizures for all regions.

⁴⁸ Rates for Island and Vancouver Coastal have changed from previous reporting. Previous reporting misclassified a police detachment belonging to Island health authority region as being a part of Vancouver Coastal.

⁴⁹ Rates were calculated using population estimates from BC Stats: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/statistics/people-population-community/population/population-estimates>.

⁵⁰ Rates do not include St'at'imx Tribal Police, RCMP Highway Patrol, RCMP District and E-Division Units, RCMP Combined Forces Special Enforcement Units, RCMP West Coast Marine Detachment, and RCMP Integrated Homicide Investigation Team.

The difference in population adjusted possession seizure rates between regions were gradually reducing in the years prior to the original s.56 exemption and to a greater extent after its implementation.

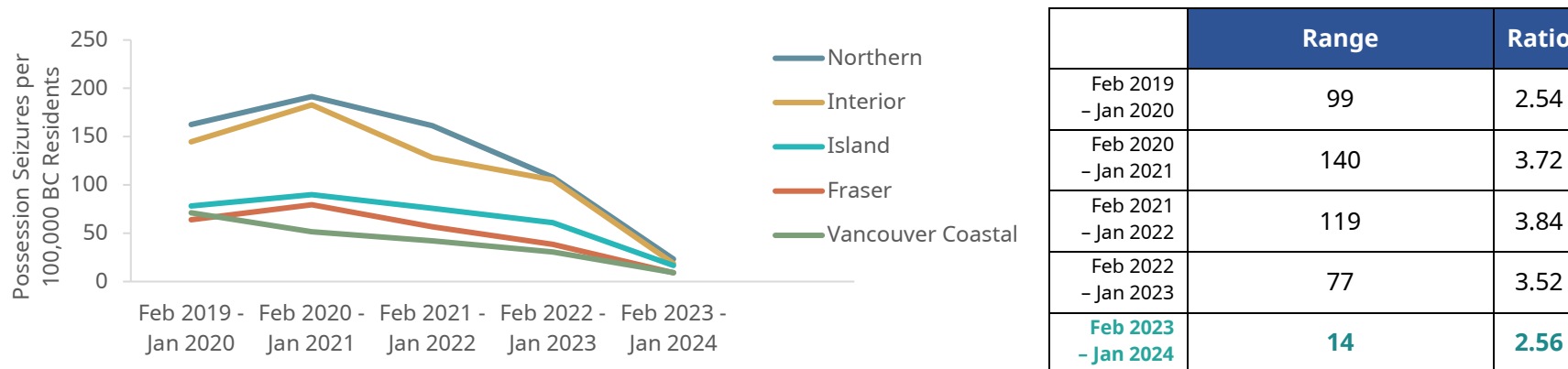


Figure 16. Seizure incidents involving exempted drugs, per 100,000 BC residents, where possession is the most serious offence, by health authority region (February 2019 – January 2024)^{51,52,53}

- The range reflects the difference in possession seizure rates between the regions with the highest and the lowest rates per year. This shows the greatest discrepancy across health authority regions.
- The difference between the Northern and Vancouver Coastal health authority regions decreased 86% between 2019 and 2023.
- The difference in population adjusted possession seizure rates between regions has been gradually reducing from 2019 to 2022 and to a greater extent since BC’s original s.56 exemption.

⁵¹ High-low range and ratio calculations changed from previous reporting. Previous reporting misclassified a police detachment belonging to Island health authority region as being a part of Vancouver Coastal.

⁵² Rates were calculated using population estimates from BC Stats: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/statistics/people-population-community/population/population-estimates>.

⁵³ Rates do not include St’at’imx Tribal Police, RCMP Highway Patrol, RCMP District and E-Division Units, RCMP Combined Forces Special Enforcement Units, RCMP West Coast Marine Detachment, and RCMP Integrated Homicide Investigation Team.

4. Next Steps

MMHA will continue to monitor the implementation and early outcomes of decriminalization, as required in Health Canada's Letter of Requirements, through the approach outlined in this report. BC is committed to continuing to work with Health Canada to understand the impacts of decriminalization to improve ongoing policy and programs and inform the future of drug policy in Canada.

Appendix A: Synthesis of Key Evidence on Police Drug Seizure Harms

Police seizures are associated with increased overdose risk.^{vi,vii,viii,ix}

- A 2024 literature review paper found that the vast majority of research found an association between police seizure and fatal overdose.^{ix}
- In the United States, 2023 and 2024 studies found an increase in both fatal and non-fatal overdose events in the immediate geographic area of a police seizure of opioids or stimulants.^{viii,xiv}
- In Vancouver, researchers found that PWUD who experienced a police seizure were more likely to report a non-fatal overdose.ⁱⁱ
- With the prevalence of strong synthetic opioids in the illegal drug supply, turning to unfamiliar sources or suppliers to replace the seized drugs increases the risk of overdose.
- Stimulant or psychedelic users who are opioid naïve might obtain replacement drugs that are contaminated with opioids like fentanyl, increasing their overdose risk.
- Opioids users' tolerance could be reduced by the unexpected disruption from police seizures. Therefore, their overdose risk is elevated when they consume their normal amount of drugs.

Police seizures increase harms experienced by PWUD by putting them in unsafe situations to replace their supply (e.g., drug debts, property theft, or sex work).^{i,ii,vi}

- Withdrawal symptoms including vomiting, depression, tremors, hallucinations, and seizures are debilitating and can be life-threatening.^{xii} Therefore, people with physical dependencies often must quickly replace the drugs that were seized.
- People struggling with addictions and poverty are likely to turn to risky behaviours to obtain replacement drugs. In a Vancouver-based study, 12% of participants engaged in illegal or dangerous activities such as theft, selling drugs, and sex work following police interaction.ⁱ
- Police drug seizures created additional need for PWUD to interact with the illicit drug market where violence and predatory behaviour is common.ⁱⁱ

Fear of drug seizure prevents people from accessing life-saving services, from calling police in unsafe situations, and from calling emergency services during overdoses.^{ii,x}

- In Vancouver, research found that drug seizure was associated with having administered naloxone to reverse an overdose.ⁱⁱ
- PWUD in BC perceived drug seizure as commonly occurring at overdoses, preventing some participants from calling 9-1-1 during an overdose event.^x
- 12% of respondents to the 2022 Harm Reduction Clinic Survey reported fear of their drugs being taken away as a barrier to seeking healthcare and treatment services.^{xiii}

Appendix B: Additional Tables and Figures

Proactive Outreach – Full Reporting by Health Authority

FRASER HEALTH AUTHORITY (4/4 positions hired)			
	May 24	June 24	July 24
# clients served	272	209	205
# unique clients	46	63	56
% connected to other service	100%	100%	100%

INTERIOR HEALTH AUTHORITY (4/4 positions hired)			
	May 24	June 24	July 24
# clients served	151	98	120
# unique clients	108	79	93
% connected to other service	29%	26%	63%
% reconnected to services*	-	24%	10%

*Note: this is a new indicator, tracking connections where repeat clients are reconnected to a service/services. This is being reported by 2 of 4 FTEs in IH to more accurately reflect how their case management system tracks clients.

ISLAND HEALTH AUTHORITY (4/4 positions hired)			
	May 24	June 24	July 24
# clients served	141	211	196
# unique clients*	39	79	78
% connected to other service	78%	71%	72%
% Caller- Individual	56%	56%	60%
% Caller- Family	27%	22%	25%
% Caller- Clinician	14%	6%	9%

*NOTE: Only one ISLH FTE (outreach nurse) reports unique client data. This data is not available for Service Link call line.

NORTHERN HEALTH AUTHORITY (3/3 positions hired)			
	May 24	June 24	July 24
# clients served	181	163	388
# unique clients	61	56	63
% connected to other service	74%	54%	51%

FIRST NATIONS HEALTH AUTHORITY (4/5 positions hired)			
	May 24	June 24	July 24
# clients served	134	142	208
# unique clients	98	114	160
% connected to other service	34%	100%	100%
#conersations/engagements with community members/partners re: decrim	335	249	332

NOTE: MMHA has been working with FNHA to ensure data collection reflects their work and mandate. FNHA is reporting an additional metric on engagement, to reflect the unique role of FNHA and these positions, which includes significant community engagement. There is one outstanding FTE to be hired.

VANCOUVER COASTAL HEALTH AUTHORITY (3/4 positions hired)			
	May 24	June 24	July 24
# unique clients served	70	37	32
% connected to another service	79%	81%	84%
# unique clients via law enforcement	1	0	2

NOTE: Previously, VCH has been reporting only clients referred through law enforcement. As of April 2024, VCH is reporting more complete client data. VCH is only reporting unique clients served, as their case management system does not record discrete interactions. There is one outstanding FTE to be hired; as well as some turnover in previously hired positions.

Possession Offences

Table 1. Offences, where the most serious offence is possession, by all police in BC (January 2019 – July 2024)^{54,55}

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2019	712	671	830	818	969	983	1,062	1,141	924	831	807	684
2020	654	735	739	868	1,136	1,031	958	868	847	751	707	637
2021	722	661	732	725	782	712	768	741	663	656	560	494
2022	486	560	607	548	649	482	532	497	509	457	472	359
2023	438	179	181	170	197	193	194	163	173	145	159	175
2024	162	117	145	122	440	442	467	-	-	-	-	-
Original s.56 Exemption Period												
New s.56 Exemption Period												

⁵⁴ An offence represents a formal police interaction and investigation based on a particular type of suspected crime. An offence is not a charge nor a conviction.

⁵⁵ Offences could be due to possession above 2.5g, possession of non-exempted substances, possession of any amount of exempted substances where the exemption does not apply, and operational complexities (e.g. trafficking offences coded as possession until investigations are complete).

Table 2. Offences, where the most serious offence is possession, by all police in BC – Offences involving, at minimum, s.56 exemption eligible substances (May 2024 – July 2024)^{56,57}

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2024	-	-	-	-	304	312	315	-	-	-	-	-
New s.56 Exemption Period												

Table 3. Offences, where the most serious offence is possession, by all police in BC – non-s.56 exemption eligible substances only (May 2024 – July 2024)^{58,59,60}

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2024	-	-	-	-	136	130	152	-	-	-	-	-
New s.56 Exemption Period												

⁵⁶ Offence files listed as predominantly involving s.56 exemption eligible substances (via its UCR code) are counted in this table. Counts in this table could include a small number of files that have both s.56 exemption eligible and non-exempted substances. Refer to the [methodology](#) section for more details.

⁵⁷ This indicator is new to BC's monitoring of decriminalization's law enforcement outcomes. As of this report, historic data (from before May 2024) is not available for this indicator.

⁵⁸ An offence represents a formal police interaction and investigation based on a particular type of suspected crime. An offence is not a charge nor a conviction.

⁵⁹ Offence files listed as involving non s.56 exemption eligible substances (via its UCR code) are counted in this table. Counts in this table do not include any files that involve a s.56 exemption eligible substance. Refer to the [methodology](#) section for more details.

⁶⁰ This indicator is new to BC's monitoring of decriminalization's law enforcement outcomes. As of this report, historic data (from before May 2024) is not available for this indicator.

Possession Seizures (Regardless of Weight)

Table 4. Seizure incidents involving exempted drugs (regardless of amount), where the most serious offence is possession, by all police in BC (January 2019 – July 2024)⁶¹

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2019	298	311	368	380	388	416	445	458	355	358	384	312
2020	330	354	373	489	612	550	494	419	410	391	363	354
2021	380	346	396	365	407	345	383	334	298	332	276	237
2022	248	296	313	255	339	246	243	233	258	221	243	194
2023	196	80	78	68	70	67	43	52	66	52	54	57
2024	49	63	66	56	139	157	179	-	-	-	-	-
Original s.56 Exemption Period												
New s.56 Exemption Period												

⁶¹ Number of seizures, regardless of amount, include both incidents with quantifiable amount and incidents with unquantifiable (e.g., “bag”) amount.

Possession Offences Over Time, by Health Authority Region

Table 5. Count and rate of possession offences, where possession is the most serious offence, by health authority region (February 2019 – January 2024)^{62,63,64,65}

	2019 (Feb 2019 – Jan 2020)		2020 (Feb 2020 – Jan 2021)		2021 (Feb 2021 – Jan 2022)		2022 (Feb 2022 – Jan 2023)		2023 (Feb 2023 – Jan 2024)	
	Count	Rate (per 100,000 residents)	Count	Rate (per 100,000 residents)	Count	Rate (per 100,000 residents)	Count	Rate (per 100,000 residents)	Count	Rate (per 100,000 residents)
Fraser	3,238	169.0	3,297	169.3	2,532	128.2	1,928	94.5	624	29.5
Interior	2,359	291.1	2,688	327.4	1,994	239.6	1,610	189.7	498	56.9
Island	1,905	224.2	1,602	186.1	1,469	168.7	1,051	118.3	401	43.7
Northern	1,190	397.4	982	326.3	827	274.1	596	196.3	199	64.3
Vancouver Coastal	1,544	125.0	1,223	98.1	1,008	80.9	787	61.8	298	22.8

⁶² Rates for Island and Vancouver Coastal have changed from previous reporting. Previous reporting misclassified a police detachment belonging to Island health authority region as being a part of Vancouver Coastal.

⁶³ An offence represents a formal police interaction and investigation based on a particular type of suspected crime. An offence is not a charge nor a conviction.

⁶⁴ Rates do not include St'l'at'imx Tribal Police, RCMP Highway Patrol, RCMP District and E-Division Units, RCMP Combined Forces Special Enforcement Units, RCMP West Coast Marine Detachment, and RCMP Integrated Homicide Investigation Team.

⁶⁵ Counts and rates will be updated when full year data are available.

Trafficking Offences and Seizures of Exempted Substances, Regardless of Amount

Table 6. Offences, where trafficking is the most serious offence, by all police in BC (January 2019 – July 2024)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2019	401	324	392	438	456	444	443	449	394	337	283	264
2020	287	334	336	381	494	419	413	360	336	345	328	266
2021	323	309	299	289	333	270	226	249	208	213	178	174
2022	189	211	246	211	220	208	224	199	175	193	172	192
2023	241	217	211	199	217	244	207	237	192	192	183	164
2024	202	160	190	161	227	184	192	-	-	-	-	-
Original s.56 Exemption Period												
New s.56 Exemption Period												

Table 7. Seizure incidents (regardless of amount), where trafficking is the most serious offence, by all police in BC (January 2019 – July 2024)⁶⁶

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2019	124	96	148	113	179	159	154	154	141	103	109	110
2020	99	112	106	133	192	183	167	144	130	153	145	128
2021	163	141	135	138	142	126	103	111	106	115	81	91
2022	100	107	125	88	117	97	114	100	86	90	78	87
2023	117	96	100	88	50	70	61	90	64	66	69	62
2024	59	80	93	71	132	97	99	-	-	-	-	-
Original s.56 Exemption Period												
New s.56 Exemption Period												

- Trafficking offences have been decreasing before the implementation of exemption s.56 from 2019 to 2022; in the first year of exemption s.56, trafficking offences have been consistent with 2022 levels and the trend over the past 4 years.
- Trafficking seizures have been decreasing before decriminalization from 2019 to 2022; in the first year of exemption s.56, the number of trafficking seizures is consistent with the trend over the past 4 years.
- According to police, the downward trend of seizure counts reflects a shift of focus from low-level subsistence trafficking to a small number of high-level large trafficking investigations. The scale and significance of the large trafficking investigations and seizures are not properly reflected in seizure counts.

⁶⁶ Number of seizures, regardless of amount, include both incidents with quantifiable amount and incidents with unquantifiable (e.g., “bag”) amount.

Distribution of Quantifiable Possession Drug Seizures by Cumulative Weight Seized, Exempted Substances Only, Over Time

Table 8. Distribution of seizure incidents involving exempted drugs, where possession is the most serious offence, where the amount is quantifiable, by all police in BC (January 2019 – July 2024)⁶⁷

0.01 – 2.5g												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2019	196	194	227	250	235	273	284	299	230	212	222	194
2020	229	234	245	304	387	329	322	266	248	217	199	204
2021	233	198	227	197	237	196	230	187	166	173	153	138
2022	147	171	178	133	187	134	129	107	124	122	131	107
2023	97	12	15	15	8	8	6	8	6	8	6	3
2024	6	6	2	3	26	41	63	-	-	-	-	-
Original s.56 Exemption Period												
New s.56 Exemption Period												

2.5 – 4.5g												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2019	21	29	41	45	46	32	39	30	26	22	30	31
2020	20	37	26	49	54	53	40	26	39	39	35	31
2021	19	22	40	29	25	30	26	28	25	34	25	19
2022	21	28	26	18	29	23	24	17	19	19	26	20
2023	19	12	16	7	6	9	4	4	9	12	7	8
2024	8	2	5	2	11	15	12	-	-	-	-	-
Original s.56 Exemption Period												
New s.56 Exemption Period												

⁶⁷ Table 6 includes only possession seizure incidents with quantifiable amount. As such, totals are different from Table 2. The upper range is inclusive.

4.5 - 10.0g												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2019	28	33	35	28	33	38	51	41	30	35	45	25
2020	26	24	36	35	57	57	45	50	48	44	36	35
2021	41	42	42	40	35	43	45	40	34	37	31	18
2022	29	29	30	35	33	33	37	36	37	17	25	18
2023	23	13	10	13	14	14	11	10	16	5	13	12
2024	7	6	6	7	18	15	15	-	-	-	-	-
Original s.56 Exemption Period												
New s.56 Exemption Period												

10.0 - 15.0g												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2019	7	14	7	12	16	17	10	19	20	6	16	12
2020	9	12	15	23	25	26	23	8	15	13	27	13
2021	16	18	11	14	19	18	17	10	15	11	11	9
2022	6	10	18	11	19	12	11	11	11	9	10	7
2023	14	11	9	5	6	6	6	5	12	6	5	9
2024	8	1	4	1	12	11	13	-	-	-	-	-
Original s.56 Exemption Period												
New s.56 Exemption Period												

15.0 - 28.0g												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2019	10	10	11	8	18	14	20	20	16	16	17	17
2020	10	9	13	18	19	27	20	18	13	16	20	20
2021	21	20	24	25	24	15	19	23	10	20	18	13
2022	15	16	14	11	20	13	11	22	23	16	12	12
2023	9	14	10	7	14	11	5	5	9	8	2	8
2024	5	6	10	7	14	20	18	-	-	-	-	-
Original s.56 Exemption Period												
New s.56 Exemption Period												

>28.0g												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2019	11	9	11	8	12	16	12	21	8	19	17	12
2020	10	17	19	29	24	22	14	19	19	30	20	24
2021	25	23	26	22	37	17	22	23	21	30	19	20
2022	19	21	23	25	24	15	16	23	30	20	25	25
2023	26	13	14	19	15	15	10	14	8	8	15	14
2024	10	20	18	15	30	31	28	-	-	-	-	-
Original s.56 Exemption Period												
New s.56 Exemption Period												

Distribution of Quantifiable Possession Drug Seizures by Cumulative Weight Seized (in Percentiles), Exempted Substances Only, Over Time

Table 9. Distribution of seizure incidents (in percentiles) involving exempted drugs, where possession is the most serious offence, where the amount is quantifiable (in grams), by all police in BC (February 2019 – July 2024)

	Weight (in grams)										
	Min	10 th Percentile	20 th Percentile	30 th Percentile	40 th Percentile	Median	60 th Percentile	70 th Percentile	80 th Percentile	90 th Percentile	Max
Feb 2019 – Jan 2020	0.01	0.10	0.20	0.42	0.70	1.00	1.59	2.80	5.08	12.09	688.00
Feb 2020 – Jan 2021	0.00	0.10	0.25	0.50	0.80	1.03	1.96	3.07	6.28	15.00	3000.00
Feb 2021 – Jan 2022	0.00	0.10	0.30	0.59	1.00	1.40	2.22	4.35	8.70	20.24	5261.34
Feb 2022 – Jan 2023	0.00	0.10	0.48	0.87	1.00	1.90	3.00	5.00	10.32	25.88	2400.00
Feb 2023 – Jan 2024	0.08	1.58	3.16	4.54	6.74	10.10	14.00	20.82	33.36	62.01	881.00
Original s.56 Exemption Period											

Possession Drug Seizures, Regardless of Amount, Over Time, by Health Authority Region

Table 10. Count and rate of seizures incidents involving exempted drugs, where possession is the most serious offence, by health authority region (February 2019 – January 2024)^{68,69,70,71}

	2019 (Feb 2019 – Jan 2020)		2020 (Feb 2020 – Jan 2021)		2021 (Feb 2021 – Jan 2022)		2022 (Feb 2022 – Jan 2023)		2023 (Feb 2023 – Jan 2024)	
	Count	Rate (per 100,000 residents)	Count	Rate (per 100,000 residents)	Count	Rate (per 100,000 residents)	Count	Rate (per 100,000 residents)	Count	Rate (per 100,000 residents)
Fraser	1,229	64.1	1,548	79.5	1,120	56.7	788	38.6	192	9.1
Interior	1,171	144.5	1,501	182.8	1,068	128.4	893	105.2	164	18.7
Island	664	78.1	774	89.9	661	75.9	542	61.0	153	16.7
Northern	487	162.6	576	191.4	487	161.4	328	108.0	72	23.3
Vancouver Coastal	879	71.2	641	51.4	524	42.0	391	30.7	121	9.3

⁶⁸ Previous regional reporting was based on RCMP district boundaries as disaggregation by health authority regions was not available. Disaggregation by health authority regions enables alignment with health service utilization statistics. Current reporting by health authority regions is not comparable to previous region reporting due to this change.

⁶⁹ Number of seizures, regardless of amount, include both incidents with quantifiable amount and incidents with unquantifiable (e.g., “bag”) amount.

⁷⁰ Rates do not include St’at’l’imx Tribal Police, RCMP Highway Patrol, RCMP District and E-Division Units, RCMP Combined Forces Special Enforcement Units, RCMP West Coast Marine Detachment, and RCMP Integrated Homicide Investigation Team.

⁷¹ Counts and rates will be updated when full year data are available.

Simple Possession Offences, Seizures, and Charges Recommended by Police Over Time

Table 11. Number of Offences, Seizure incidents involving exempted drugs (regardless of amount), and Recommended Charges, where possession is the most serious offence, by all police in BC (2019 – 2023)

	Offences		Seizures (Regardless of Amount)		Recommended Charges ⁷²	
	Count	% Change (From previous year)	Count	% Change (From previous year)	Count	% Change (From previous year)
2019 (Full Year)	10,432	-	4,473	-	1,693	-
2020 (Full Year)	9,931	-5%	5,139	15%	1,292	-24%
2021 (Full Year)	8,216	-17%	4,099	-20%	485	-62%
2022 (Full Year)	6,158	-25%	3,089	-25%	222	-54%
2023 (Full Year)	2,367	-62%	883	-71%	-	-

- Before the implementation of exemption s.56, recommended charges for simple possession decreased substantially by 87%, from 2019 to 2022. Possession related offences and seizures also decreased, but not at the same rate as recommended charges. Possession offences decreased by 41% while possession seizures decreased by 31%.
- In 2022, there were 222 recommended charges compared to 6,157 possession offences and 3,087 possession seizures.

⁷² Counts do not include recommended charges from Stl'at'l'imx Tribal Police.

BC Population (2019 – 2023)

Regional analyses completed in this report are based on health authority boundaries. Previous reporting used RCMP policing districts for regional disaggregation. Disaggregation by health authority regions, which was not previously available, enables improved alignment with health service utilization statistics.

Populations for each health authority region are derived from BCStats.⁷³ Numbers reflect BC’s total population and are used in calculating regional crime rates.

Table 12. BC Population by Health Authority Regions (2019 - 2023)

	Fraser	Interior	Island	Northern	Vancouver Coastal
2019	1,916,426	810,461	849,840	299,439	1,234,856
2020	1,947,183	820,997	860,748	300,909	1,246,264
2021	1,975,309	832,084	870,804	301,763	1,246,705
2022	2,041,055	848,572	888,705	303,610	1,274,342
2023	2,113,460	875,266	916,750	309,251	1,304,286

⁷³ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/statistics/people-population-community/population/population-estimates>

Police Agencies and Health Authority Regions

Table 13. Police Agencies and Health Authority Alignment

Fraser	Interior	Island	Northern	Vancouver Coastal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abbotsford Police Department Burnaby RCMP Coquitlam RCMP Delta Police Department Integrated Road Safety Unit - Fraser Valley Langley RCMP Mission RCMP New Westminster Police Service Port Moody Police Department Ridge Meadows RCMP Surrey RCMP Upper Fraser Valley Reg RCMP White Rock RCMP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100 Mile House RCMP Alexis Creek RCMP Ashcroft RCMP Barriere RCMP Boundary RCMP Castlegar RCMP Central Kootenay RCMP Chase RCMP Clearwater RCMP Clinton RCMP Columbia Valley RCMP Cranbrook / Kimberley RCMP Creston RCMP Elk Valley RCMP Golden RCMP Kamloops RCMP Kelowna RCMP Keremeos RCMP Lillooet RCMP Logan Lake RCMP Lytton RCMP Merritt RCMP Nelson Police Department North Okanagan RCMP North Okanagan Rural RCMP Penticton RCMP Princeton RCMP Revelstoke RCMP Salmon Arm RCMP Sicamous RCMP South Okanagan RCMP Summerland RCMP Trail & Greater District RCMP Williams Lake RCMP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alert Bay RCMP BC Highway Patrol - Vancouver Island Campbell River RCMP Central Island Traffic Services Central Saanich Police Service Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit (Island Region) Comox Valley RCMP E Division (Vir) RCMP Gabriola Island RCMP Integrated Road Safety Unit - Capital Regional District Integrated Road Safety Unit - North Island Island District Ladysmith RCMP Lake Cowichan RCMP Nanaimo RCMP Nootka Sound RCMP North Cowichan/Duncan Det North Island Traffic Services Oak Bay Police Department Oceanside RCMP Outer Gulf Islands RCMP Port Alberni RCMP Port Hardy RCMP Quadra Island RCMP Saanich Police Department Salt Spring Island RCMP Sayward RCMP Shawnigan Lake RCMP Sidney - North Saanich RCMP Sooke RCMP South Island Traffic Services Tofino RCMP (Ahousaht) Ucluelet RCMP Victoria Police Department West Shore RCMP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Atlin RCMP Burns Lake RCMP Chetwynd RCMP Daajing Giids (Queen Charlotte) RCMP Dawson Creek RCMP Dease Lake RCMP Fort St James RCMP Fort St. John Fraser Lake RCMP Houston RCMP Hudson's Hope RCMP Kitimat RCMP Lisims/Nass Valley RCMP Mackenzie RCMP Masset RCMP McBride RCMP New Hazelton RCMP Northern Rockies RCMP Prince George RCMP Prince Rupert RCMP Quesnel RCMP Smithers RCMP Stewart RCMP Takla Landing RCMP Terrace RCMP Tsay Keh Dene RCMP Tumbler Ridge RCMP Valemount RCMP Vanderhoof RCMP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anahim Lake RCMP Bella Bella RCMP Bella Coola RCMP Bowen Island RCMP North Vancouver RCMP Port McNeil RCMP Powell River RCMP Richmond RCMP Squamish RCMP Sunshine Coast RCMP University RCMP Vancouver Police Department West Vancouver Police Department Whistler/Pemberton RCMP

BC Corrections Drug Related Offence Clients

Table 14. Average daily count (ADC) of **community corrections clients** whose most serious offence (MSO) was a charge and/or conviction for a drug related offence. (2019 - 2023)⁷⁴

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
ADC of individuals with drug related MSO	1,220.6 (6%)	1,013.2 (5%)	879.5 (5%)	804.9 (5%)	695.8 (4%)
Drug Trafficking	510.1 (2%)	433.5 (2%)	377.4 (2%)	327.1 (2%)	252.6 (1%)
Drug Possession	157.8 (1%)	100.6 (1%)	64.6 (0%)	48.7 (0%)	32.1 (0%)
Possession for the Purpose of Trafficking	552.7 (3%)	479.1 (2%)	437.4 (2%)	429.1 (3%)	411.1 (2%)
Overall ADC- Community Corrections	20,835.3	19,575.2	17,670.4	17,124.4	17,051.6

Table 15. Average daily count (ADC) of individuals in **provincial custody** whose most serious offence (MSO) was a charge and/or conviction for a drug related offence. (2019 - 2023)⁷⁵

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
ADC of individuals with drug related MSO	135.6 (6%)	73.1 (4%)	76.7 (5%)	64.1 (4%)	57.7 (3%)
Drug Trafficking	68.4 (3%)	43.0 (3%)	40.0 (3%)	29.5 (2%)	22.2 (1%)
Drug Possession	0.2 (0%)	0.0 (0%)	0.2 (0%)	0.0 (0%)	0.0 (0%)
Possession for the Purpose of Trafficking	67.1 (3%)	30.1 (2%)	36.6 (2%)	34.6 (2%)	35.5 (2%)
Overall ADC- Custody	2,286.5	1,656.0	1,525.9	1,659.6	1,828.9

⁷⁴ Data extracted from Cognos BI on February 28, 2024. Data represents individuals whose most serious offence for which they were charged and/or convicted was drug related. Therefore, individuals with both drug related charges and charges more serious in nature are not included. Due to rounding, percentages may not total as expected.

⁷⁵ Same as above.

Appendix C: Additional Contextual Indicators

Information related to the contextual indicators will be provided as appendix when they become available and appropriate for reporting.

Indicator	Source
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of clients accessing prescribed safer supply 	Escalated Drug-Poisoning Response Actions Factsheet (January 2024)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of paramedic-attended overdose events 	BCCDC Unregulated Drug Poisoning Emergency Dashboard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of paramedic-attended overdose events: First Nations people 	FNHA – Toxic Drug Crisis Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of illicit drug toxicity deaths 	BC Coroners Service – Unregulated Drug Deaths Dashboard (Updated December 2023)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of illicit drug toxicity deaths: First Nations people 	FNHA – Toxic Drug Crisis Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in drugs implicated in fatal overdoses 	BC Coroners Service – Unregulated Drug Deaths Dashboard (Updated December 2023)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth substance use trends 	BC Adolescent Health Survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population level substance use trends 	Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjacent crime statistics 	Statistics Canada Incident-based Crime Statistics

Appendix D: References

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