Maaji-Mashkiki inaakowin omaa Kaanada onjisemagan onji maji-zhiingewigeng zhigo gaagii-biitoowaad izhichigewinan, zhigo Ondaadiziig ishkoniganinginan ogii-nagishkaanaawaa ginwenzh mewinzhe onji Maaji-Mashkiki inaakowinan maanzhidoodaange, dagwe-ozaam niibawa zhimaaganishiiwang zhigo apichi-niibawa gibwaawangeng onji Ondaadiziig Obimaadiziig onji maaji-mashkiki obookonang onashowewinan.

2. What if I have a prescription?

It is legal to possess a drug that is prescribed to you, provided that the prescription is in your name. For some drugs, the prescription also has to authorize you to carry them outside your home. It is a good idea to keep your paper prescription with you if you intend to carry your dose(s). It is illegal to possess another person's prescription drug, even if they share it with you. It is illegal to share your prescription drug with another person.

3. Does the amount of drug I possess make a difference?

It is a serious criminal offence to possess drugs for the purpose of giving them to someone else, whether you sell them or share them freely (i.e. "drug trafficking"). In Canadian law, there is no specific "threshold quantity" that distinguishes between possession for personal use and possession for "trafficking." However, police and courts will consider the quantity when deciding if someone possessed drugs for personal use or for trafficking (e.g. the larger the quantity, the more likely they consider the possession for trafficking). They also consider factors such as the amount of cash on the person, and the presence of items such as scales and baggies.

SENTENCING AND GLADUE FACTORS

Anti-Indigenous racism is well documented in the criminal legal system in Canada, which has resulted in the mass incarceration of Indigenous people. To respond to this, the law requires judges to consider the unique history that played a part in bringing Indigenous people to court. The judges are required to consider this history, known as "Gladue factors," in deciding whether you should get bail while waiting for trial. If your case went to trial and you were convicted, they must also consider this when deciding your sentence, as well as at other stages of the criminal proceedings. This is true for all Indigenous Peoples, including status and non-status First Nation, Inuit, and Métis people, and whether someone is living on or off reserve.

Judges should always automatically consider Gladue factors but sometimes they don't. It is important that you inform your lawyer that you are Indigenous and that you work with them to get a strong Gladue report, which gives the court information about your unique background, at your bail or pre-sentencing hearing. If you are charged and brought to court and you do not have a lawyer, you should ask to speak to an Indigenous court worker or organizations in the courthouse you are brought to.

For information about your rights when police stop you for a drug-related offence, see our website at: www.hivlegalnetwork.ca/IndigenousKYR



WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF:



Department of Justice Canada Ministère de la Justice Canada

THIS PAMPHLET IS CURRENT TO AUGUST 2024, BUT THE LAW MAY CHANGE.

KNOWYOUR RIGHTS on drug laws for Indigenous people who use drugs





Drug policy in Canada is rooted in racism and colonialism, and Indigenous communities have experienced long histories of drug policy harms, including the over-policing and mass incarcerations of Indigenous Peoples for drug offences.

Mpisuney kinua'taqn etek Kanata na wetaqane'wasik penoqite'taqn aqq aklasi'awitasik, aqq lnu'ekati'l wetapetami'tij pekije'k mpisuney kinua'taqn ji'lek, wi'aqtek ula piami-mountik aqq ma'muni pijo'lujik ln'u mimajuinuk ukjit mpisuney opla'taqatijik.

maci-maskihkiy owiyasiwêwina kânatanihk pêpakwâtikosiwin mîna, môniyâw-mâkohikêwin, êkwa iyiniwak ihtâwina ka-kiskisiwak kinwêsk nâway kî-ispîhk ohci maci-maskihki owiyasiwêwina mâyinikêhkâtowin, êkwa mîna ôma osâmi-sôhkêsîhcikêwin mîna mihcêt kipahowêwina ohci iyiniwak ohci maci-maskihkiy pîkon-wiyasiwêwina.

This pamphlet answers questions about Canada's drug laws to provide better knowledge of drug offences and the powers of police, prosecutors, and courts.

It provides legal information, not legal advice. Legal information can help you understand the law, but it is general. Legal advice is specifically about your situation. If you want or need legal advice, you should talk to a lawyer. (See www.hivlegalnetwork.ca/ indigenouscommunities for information about how to find a lawyer.)

1. Is it against the law to use or have drugs on me for my own personal use?

In Canada, it is a crime to possess "controlled substances" like opioids, cocaine, methamphetamines, and ecstasy, even for your own personal use ("simple possession") unless they have been prescribed to you. The federal law that regulates these drugs is called the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* (CDSA), and simple possession is prohibited under section 4.







There is also a separate law for cannabis called the *Cannabis Act*. While recreational cannabis use was legalized in 2018, there are still restrictions on possessing the drug. People aged 18 and over are only permitted to possess cannabis that they have obtained from government-authorized sellers or to grow up to four cannabis plants per household, and only up to 30 grams of dried cannabis in a public space. Some provinces have also established rules about the maximum quantity of cannabis you can possess at home.

Each province has also established minimum ages for recreational cannabis possession.

People can face criminal prosecution for possessing any cannabis obtained *illegally* (i.e. not through a government-authorized source).

Breaking any of these laws could lead to imprisonment of up to five years for those aged 18 and over and a youth sentence for those under 18. Individual provinces may have additional laws that govern where consumption can and cannot occur.





ARTIST: BRIAN KOWIKCHUK

OTHER EXCEPTIONS TO CHARGES OF SIMPLE DRUG POSSESSION UNDER The CDSA:

If you are at the scene of an overdose:

- The *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* can prevent police from charging you and others at the scene of an overdose, if you have sought medical help for yourself or for someone else who has overdosed. In this case, police cannot charge you for simple possession, or for violating any condition of your parole, bail, probation, or conditional sentence ("house arrest") related to a previous simple possession charge.
- The *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* does not prevent police from charging you and others for other offences outside of simple possession; outstanding arrest warrants; or violating any condition of your parole, bail, probation, or conditional sentence relating to an offence that is not simple possession.

If you live in B.C., different rules apply. See website for more information.



4. Can I be arrested for using the services of a needle and syringe program, a supervised consumption site, or overdose prevention service?

You cannot be arrested for merely being present at a needle and syringe program, a supervised consumption site, or overdose prevention service.

While it is against the law to possess certain drugs in Canada (with the exceptions noted in Q1 above), the government can exempt clients and operators of a supervised consumption site or overdose prevention service from criminal prosecution for the possession of illegal drugs while they are on the premises. In practice, this means that you can possess and use drugs without the threat of criminal prosecution, **if you do it inside the exempted site or service.** You are not exempt while in transit to the site.

Other harm reduction settings, like a needle and syringe program, are not exempted from Canada's drug laws, so you may still risk criminal charges if you use drugs inside those locations (with the exceptions noted in Q1 above).





ARTIST: BRIAN DWAYNE SARAZIN

5. Can I be charged for possessing drug use equipment?

Outside a harm reduction setting, you cannot be criminally charged for simply *having* drug use equipment. We are not aware of anyone ever being charged for merely possessing unused drug use equipment.

However, it is important to note that some cities have specific laws that prohibit the use or "display" of drug use equipment or "drug paraphernalia" in public spaces.

6. What about having *used* drug equipment?

Possessing equipment that has been used and contains traces of illegal drugs is technically against the law, just like possessing the drugs themselves is illegal.

Police have confiscated or destroyed drug use equipment they have found on people and threatened to arrest people because of drug residue in their equipment or otherwise used the possession of used equipment as the basis to search and lay other charges. While such incidents may be less common, it is important to know you *may* be at risk of prosecution for the crime of possessing illegal drugs (or other offences, depending on the results of a search) just by possessing the equipment after it has been used.