



Press Statement

CAP – The CACP Call for Decriminalization Supports Reconciliation

July 13th 2020 (Ottawa, ON) –

The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) supports the July 9th 2020 policy announcement by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) to decriminalize simple possession of illicit drugs, and the adoption of a public health focus on substance abuse.

Organizations which have called for decriminalization include the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), Canadian Nurses Association, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, Canadian Drug Policy Coalition, Pivot Legal Network, Canadian Public Health Association, and others.

These recommendations from the CACP and others are similar to policies launched in Portugal in 2001. Decriminalization is credited with declining drug use, lower rates of overdoses, positive public health impacts, crime reduction, and lower incarceration rates¹.

Indigenous people in Canada face significantly higher incarceration rates, suffer higher rates of addiction and mental illness, and are disproportionately impacted from criminalization and the lack of drug treatment.

“The impact of decriminalization on indigenous people in Canada would be huge” says CAP Vice-Chief Kim Beaudin, “We could divert people into treatment centres instead of filling up even more jails and prisons. Mandatory sentencing and criminalization of drug possession inflict a heavy price on our people.”

CAP calls on all parties to support this policy shift as a non-partisan public health measure with demonstrated financial and social benefits.

Decriminalization would be consistent with recommendations on public health and lowering Indigenous incarceration from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report of 2015 and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) report of 2019. Demands for improved health supports and a focus on alternatives to incarceration featured prominently in both reports, and decriminalization would be consistent with those calls to action.

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The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples is the national voice representing the interests of Métis, status and non-status Indians, and Southern Inuit Indigenous People living off-reserve. Today, over 70% of Indigenous people live off-reserve.

¹ <https://transformdrugs.org/drug-decriminalisation-in-portugal-setting-the-record-straight/>