

# **DRUG ARRESTS in CANADA, 2017**

*Addendum*



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**PREPARED FOR THE VANCOUVER AREA NETWORK OF DRUG USERS**

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## Summary of 2018 report and addendum

*Drug Use, arrests, policing, and imprisonment in Canada and BC, 2015-2016*  
*Drug Arrests in Canada, 2017\**

By Susan Boyd, PhD, for the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU)

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**In 2017, there were 90,625 drug arrests in Canada.**

In 2016, there were 95,417 arrests in Canada.

- **In 2017, 42% of all drug arrests were for cannabis possession.**
- In 2016, 46% of all drug arrest were for cannabis possession.

The decrease in cannabis possession arrests is in fact relatively small given that the federal Task Force on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation report was released in November 2016 and the *Cannabis Act* was introduced to the House of Commons in April 2017 (the *Cannabis Act* will come into force in October 2018). This imminent change in the law might have been expected to decrease significantly the number of cannabis possession arrests, but that is not the case.

In addition, the overwhelmingly majority of drug arrests continue to be for drug possession. **In 2017, 72% of all drug arrests were for personal possession.**

Little attention has been given to the **increase in possession arrests for other criminalized drugs**. Canada is currently experiencing the worst illegal drug overdose death crisis in its history. Given the extent of the crisis, it begs asking why possession arrests for heroin, methamphetamine, and “Other Drugs” (listed by Statistics Canada as fentanyl, opioid prescriptions, etc.) are increasing across Canada.

- **In 2017, there were 2,219 heroin possession arrests in Canada.**
- In 2010, there were 464 heroin possession arrests in Canada.
- **In 2017, there were 8,996 methamphetamines possession arrests in Canada.**
- In 2010, there were 1,523 methamphetamines possession arrests in Canada.

The illegal drug overdose death crisis in Canada stems from drug prohibition. It is estimated that in 2017, there were 3,996 preventable drug overdose deaths across Canada, and deaths continue to rise in 2018. In response to the crisis and in order to save lives, all currently criminalized drugs (not just cannabis) should be legally regulated so that people are no longer exposed to a poisoned drug supply (adulterated drugs of unknown quality and potency sold on the illegal market). Flexible opioid and stimulant programs must be implemented immediately throughout Canada, and the police/RCMP should direct people to drug substitution programs and overdose prevention sites, rather than arresting them for drug possession. Decriminalization of personal possession of all drugs is a first step.

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## ***Addendum: Drug Arrests in Canada in 2017***<sup>1</sup>

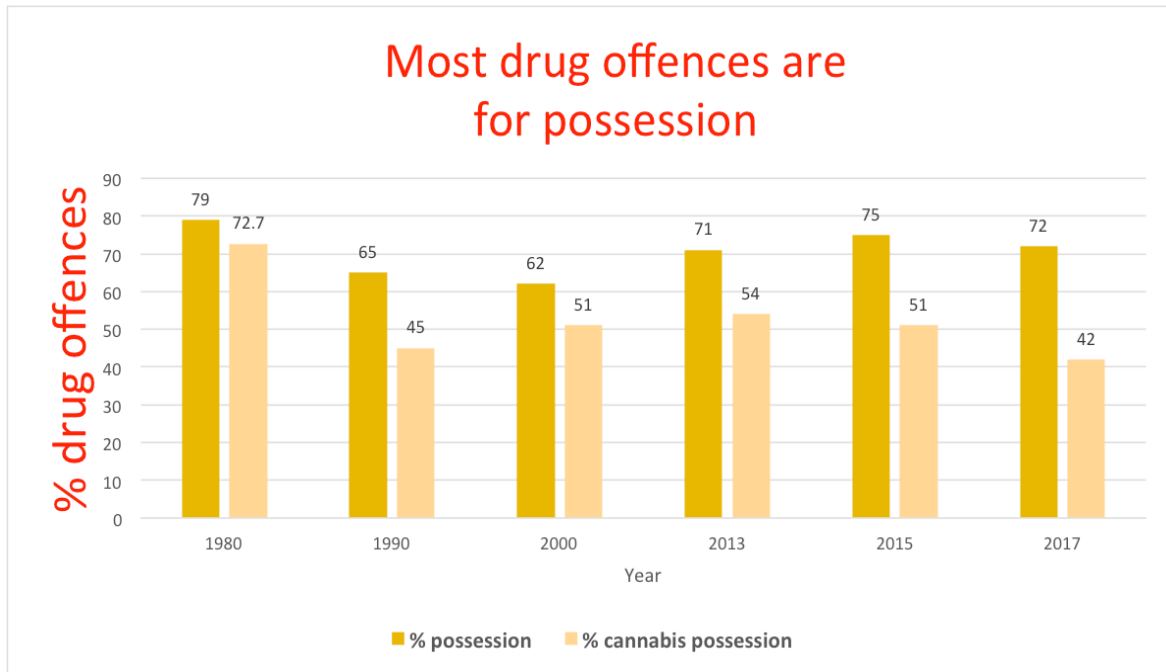
In January 2018, I gave a presentation to the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) on Canadian drug arrests, administration of justice arrests, and prison statistics. As a result of VANDU's interest, I created a report: ***Drug Use, Arrests, Policing, and Imprisonment in Canada and BC, 2015–2016***.<sup>2</sup> The report was intended to provide VANDU, as well as other drug user unions and activists, access to the same information and statistics that were provided in the presentation, and more. Refer to the original report for an in-depth discussion of drug prohibition.<sup>2</sup> This addendum: ***Drug Arrests in Canada, 2017*** includes newly available drug and administration of justice arrest data from Statistics Canada.<sup>3</sup>

Drug arrests in Canada have decreased from 109,091 drug arrests (a rate of 317 per 100,000 people) in 2012 to 90,625 drug arrests (a rate of 247 per 100,000 people) in 2017.

- In **2017**, there were **90,625 drug arrests** in Canada (247 per 100,000 people).
- In **2016**, there were **95,417 drug arrests** in Canada (263 per 100,000 people).
- In **2015**, there were **99,827 drug arrests** in Canada (278 per 100,000 people).

*The majority of drug arrests are still for possession. In 2017, there were 90,625 drug arrests (a rate of 247 per 100,000 people). Of these arrests, 72% were for drug possession.*

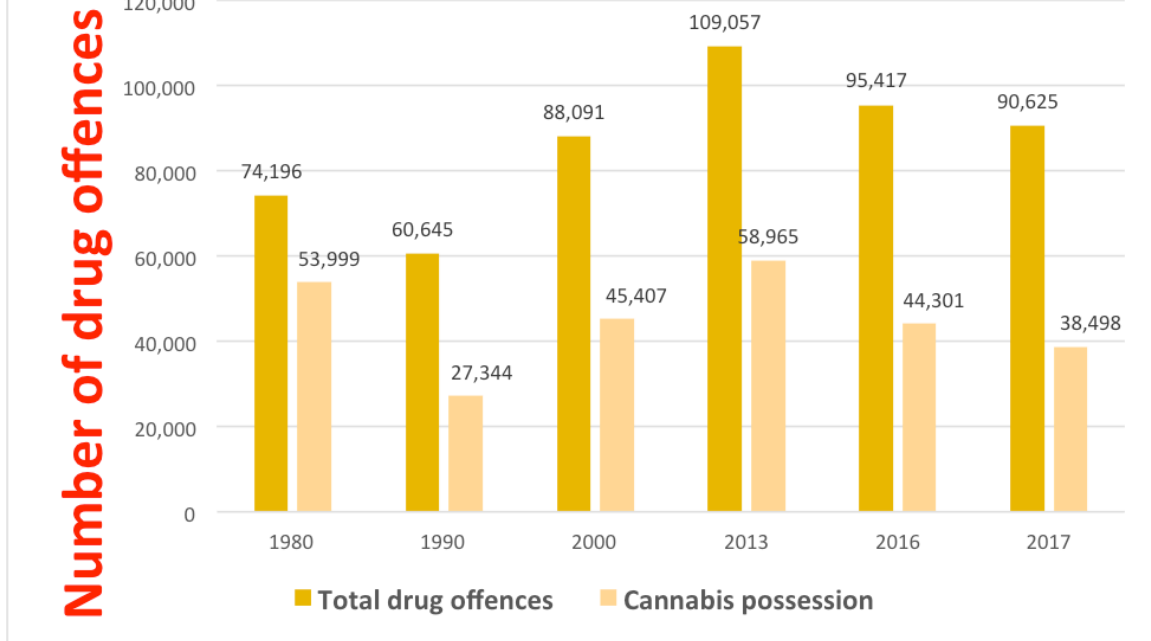
## Drug Possession Arrests 1980–2017



## Cannabis Possession Arrests

In 2017, there were 90,625 drug arrests across Canada. Of these arrests, **42% were for cannabis possession**. There were 38,498 cannabis possession arrests in Canada in 2017. Cannabis possession arrests have been slowly declining since 2014. There were also 9,494 cannabis-related arrests for trafficking (5,205), production (2,329), and importation/exportation (1,960), making up 11% of the total drug arrests in 2017. **In total, cannabis-related offences made up 53% of all drug arrests in 2017.**

## Most Cannabis offences in Canada are for possession



The news media has been vocal about the decrease in cannabis possession arrests in 2016 and 2017. However, the decrease in cannabis possession arrests is in fact relatively small given that the federal Task Force on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation report was released in November 2016 and the *Cannabis Act* was introduced to the House of Commons in April 2017 (the *Cannabis Act* will come into force in October 2018). This imminent change in the law might have been expected to decrease significantly the number of cannabis possession arrests, but that is not the case. Furthermore, little attention has been given to the **increase in possession arrests for other criminalized drugs**. Canada is currently experiencing the worst illegal drug overdose death crisis in its history. Given the extent of the crisis, it begs asking why possession arrests for heroin, methamphetamine, and “Other Drugs” (listed by Statistics Canada as fentanyl, opioid prescriptions, etc.) are increasing across Canada.

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The illegal drug overdose death crisis in Canada stems from drug prohibition. In response to the crisis and in order to save lives, all currently criminalized drugs should be legally regulated so that people are no longer exposed to a poisoned drug supply (adulterated drugs of unknown quality and potency sold on the illegal market). Further, flexible opioid and stimulant programs must be implemented immediately throughout Canada, and the police/RCMP should be directing people to drug substitution programs and overdose prevention sites, rather than arresting them for drug possession. Advocates call for the decriminalization of personal possession of all drugs as a first step.

## **Drug Arrests and Rates in 2017**

The total arrests in this section combine both youth and adult arrests for 2017.

**Canada: 90,625 drug arrests** (247 per 100,000 people)

**British Columbia: 19,608 drug arrests** (407 per 100,000 people)

- **City of Vancouver: 2,369 drug arrests** (350 per 100,000 people)
- **Surrey: 2,194 drug arrests** (423 per 100,000 people)
- **Kelowna: 1,432 drug arrests** (713 per 100,000 people)
- **Northwest Territories: 360 drug arrests** (808 per 100,000 people)

Total drug arrests in Vancouver increased slightly from 2,345 arrests in 2016 to 2,369 arrests in 2017; however, the drug arrest rate remained unchanged. However, the City of Kelowna, BC stands out again as having one of the highest drug arrest rates in Canada. This means that the rate of arrests in Kelowna is twice that of the city of Vancouver. The number of drug arrests in Kelowna also increased from 1,366 arrests in 2016 to 1,432 in 2017.

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## **Alberta Drug Arrests in 2017**

- 11,391 drug arrests in Alberta in 2017 (266 per 100,000 people, a decrease from 2016)
- 3,734 cannabis possession arrests in 2017 (87 per 100,000 people, a decrease from 2016)

There was a decrease in cannabis possession arrests in 2017 in Alberta and a steady increase since 2011 in possession arrests for heroin, methamphetamines, and “Other Drugs” such as fentanyl.

## **City of Edmonton Drug Arrests in 2017**

- 2,661 drug arrests in the City of Edmonton in 2017 (271 per 100,000 people, an increase from 2016)
- 445 cannabis possession arrests in the City of Edmonton in 2017 (45 per 100,000 people, a decrease from 2016)

In the City of Edmonton, total drug arrests increased in 2017. Since 2011, arrests for possession of heroin, methamphetamine, and “Other Drugs” such as fentanyl have increased. Cannabis possession arrests have declined.

## **City of Montréal, Quebec, Drug Arrests in 2017**

- 6,165 drug arrests in the City of Montréal in 2017 (303 per 100,000 people, an increase from 2016)
- 1,490 cannabis possession arrests in Montréal in 2017 (73 per 100,000 people, an increase from 2016)

The City of Montréal had a slight increase in possession of cocaine and methamphetamine arrests from 2016 to 2017.

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## **City of Toronto, Ontario drug arrests in 2017**

- 2,966 drug arrests in the City of Toronto in 2017 (101 per 100,000 people, a decrease from 2016)
- 1,038 cannabis possession arrests in Toronto in 2017 (35 per 100,000 people, a decrease from 2016)

The City of Toronto had a slight decrease in possession of heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine arrests from 2016 to 2017.

## **Administration of Justice Offences 2017**

### **Canada**

- 216,836 administration of justice arrests across Canada in 2017 (591 per 100,000 people, an increase from 2016)

### **British Columbia**

- 19,868 administration of justice arrests in BC in 2017 (412 per 100,000 people, an increase from 2016)

### **City of Vancouver**

- 2,696 administration of justice arrests in Vancouver in 2017 (398 per 100,000 people, a decrease from 2016)

**Most administration of justice arrests in Vancouver in 2017 were for:**

- Breach of probation: 1,373 arrests
- Fail to comply with order: 1092 arrests



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## **Alberta**

- 48,184 administration of justice arrests in Alberta in 2017 (1,124 per 100,000 people, an increase from 2016)

## **City of Edmonton**

- 24,167 administration of justice arrests in Edmonton in 2017 (2,463 per 100,000 people, an increase from 2016)

## **Most administration of justice arrests in Edmonton in 2017 were for:**

- Fail to comply with order: 18,981 arrests
- Fail to appear: 4,437 arrests

The rate of arrests in the City Edmonton for administrative of justice offences is six times more than the City of Vancouver.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The addendum and the original report are available at:  
<http://drugpolicy.ca/about/publications>

<sup>2</sup> Boyd, S. (2018, March 9). Drug use, arrests, policing and imprisonment in Canada and BC, 2015-2016. Vancouver: Author. Available at:  
<http://drugpolicy.ca/about/publications/>

<sup>3</sup> All statistics in the addendum are drawn from Statistics Canada, Incidence-based crime statistics.

This addendum can be cited as:

Susan Boyd (2018, September 15). Drug Arrests in Canada, 2017. Vancouver, BC: Author. <http://drugpolicy.ca/about/publications>

The original report, *Drug Use, Arrests, Policing, and Imprisonment in Canada and BC, 2015–2016* and the addendum, *Drug Arrests in Canada, 2017*, are available on Canadian Drug Policy Coalition’s webpage:  
<http://drugpolicy.ca/about/publications>

Cover photo: Jail cell at Oakalla Prison, photographer Jack Lindsay, 1940s. City of Vancouver Archives: CVA 1184-2268. Public domain.

Susan Boyd, PhD, is a Distinguished Professor in the Faculty of Human and Social Development, University of Victoria. She is the author of a number of articles, books, and reports on drug issues (<http://susancboyd.ca>). Her most recent book, *Busted: An illustrated history of drug prohibition in Canada*, was published by Fernwood Publishing in 2017.

# VANDU



**Vancouver Area Network  
of Drug Users**