

VOTING IN RIGHTS-BASED DRUG POLICY CHAMPIONS

A MUNICIPAL VOTER RESOURCE

Background & Dates

Municipal governments, along with federal and provincial governments, have an important role to play in reforming harmful drug policies. To support public health and human rights, the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition (CDPC) advocates for full decriminalization of simple drug possession and necessity trafficking*, investment into social supports such as housing, expansion of safe supply and harm reduction measures, and legal regulation of all drugs under a single regulatory framework.

To forward key policy changes such as decriminalization, and to support harm reduction measures such as supervised consumption sites, having support from city council can make all the difference in implementing the changes that are needed to address the drug toxicity crisis.

Many provinces and territories across Canada will be holding elections for their municipal governments this fall 2022:

British Columbia - Sat. Oct. 15

Northwest Territories (Yellowknife) - Mon. Oct. 17

Ontario - Mon. Oct. 24

Manitoba - Wed. Oct. 26

Prince Edward Island - Mon. Nov. 7

Saskatchewan (even-numbered divisions in rural municipalities) - Wed. Nov. 9

New Brunswick - Mon. Nov. 28

Northwest Territories (Hamlets) - Mon. Dec. 12

This is an important time to provide input on who you want to represent you on city council, and to talk to your friends, family and community about the realities of prohibition and the need for drug policy reform. Here are some resources to learn from and share with your community:

- [A Right-Based Path for Drug Policy](#)
- [Avoiding Stigmatizing Language](#)
- [Evidence Around Harm Reduction and Public Health-Based Drug Policies](#)
- [Critical Terminology Guide](#)

You can vote if you are a Canadian citizen, over the age of 18, and if you live in the municipality, or if you or your spouse own or rent property in a municipality. You can also vote in the area where you have slept in the past five weeks if you do not have a permanent home address.

For more information on registering to vote, ID requirements, and locations to vote, please visit your municipality's website.

*Necessity trafficking is sharing or selling drugs for subsistence, to support personal use, or to provide a safe supply.



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What is the role of municipal governments in drug policy reform?

1

Harm Reduction

City council can act as an important advocate for harm reduction services both within the city and to the provincial or territorial government. City council can offer proactive and vocal public support for harm reduction initiatives to help alleviate the burden faced by nonprofits focused on harm reduction service delivery. As a vocal supporter, city council can help shift the public narrative towards seeing harm reduction initiatives as essential healthcare services. Further, the city can use its resources and reach to bring people together and engage the community in understanding the merits and need for harm reduction services in the municipality. Municipalities can also support harm reduction service delivery by offering city-owned properties to underfunded frontline agencies as rent-free locations for service operations.

2

Right to Life

City council can support the Charter right to life by requesting funds from the province or territory for healthcare, income support and affordable, accessible housing. City council has an important role to play in supporting the immediate needs of unhoused people by ensuring access to public washrooms and water and implementing bylaw and enforcement policies that do not infringe on the human rights of unhoused people, at a minimum. The city can also work to identify suitable land and properties that could offer support services that uphold people's right to life such as housing, harm reduction, and healthcare services.

3

Decriminalization

City council can request decriminalization in the city from the federal government through applying for a Section 56 exemption. This request can also come from the municipal board of health or the medical health officer.

4

Supervised consumption

City council can help support supervised consumption sites by publicly endorsing the sites and approving the location of supervised consumption sites in a timely manner. City council has an important role in alleviating community backlash for a proposed supervised consumption site by offering public support and acting as an advocate for these lifesaving services. City council also has the reach and resources to convene people to build support for supervised consumption services and share education on why these services are important community supports that benefit everyone.

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Engaging with Candidates on issues

In the weeks leading up to a municipal election, candidates for mayor and city council will be campaigning for your vote. This is an opportunity to ask questions at public events they may be attending such as all-candidates debates, or to call or email their office to ask what kinds of policy positions they will take on specific issues. Document their answers and share them with your community, write op-eds in your local papers, coordinate with local community groups with shared interests to conduct outreach to candidates, and let them know that these issues matter to voters.

Questions to ask candidates on drug policy and harm reduction

What is your position on decriminalizing drugs? Will you support decriminalization of drugs in [your city]?

What is your position on harm reduction initiatives such as supervised consumption sites and safe supply programs? Will you support harm reduction initiatives in [your city]?

What steps will you take to immediately address the drug toxicity and drug poisoning crisis that is causing so many deaths and injuries in our community?

As a member of city council, how would you work to shift municipal drug policy and practices towards a health- and human rights-based approach?

Do you support the recommendations of the federal expert task force on substance use which state that decriminalization and expansion of a safe supply of substances is urgently needed to address the loss of life we are witnessing?

Will you support drug policy development processes that incorporate meaningful consultation with people who use drugs, including providing funding for people who use drugs to provide relevant expertise?

Drug prohibition is deeply rooted in racism and colonialism and disproportionately impacts Indigenous people, people of colour, women, 2SLGBTQ+, and youth. If elected, what steps would you take to support these priority populations in relation to the drug poisoning crisis?

A lack of harm reduction measures in shelters is a central barrier to accessing shelter. If elected, will you hold shelter providers accountable to implement best practices of harm reduction to improve services for unhoused people and ultimately save more lives?