

## **“2.5 GRAMS, I COULD DO THAT BEFORE NOON”: PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS’ PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPACTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA’S DECRIMINALIZATION OF ILLEGAL DRUGS THRESHOLD LIMIT**

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### **Background:**

In May 2022, Health Canada approved a three-year exemption from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act decriminalizing possession of certain illegal substances for personal use among adults in the province of British Columbia. The exemption explicitly includes a cumulative threshold of 2.5 grams of opioids, cocaine, methamphetamine, and MDMA. Threshold quantities are commonly included in decriminalization policies and justified within law enforcement systems to define personal use among people who use drugs versus drug dealers who are carrying for trafficking purposes. Understanding the impact of the 2.5-gram threshold can help define the scope to which people will be decriminalized.

### **Methods:**

From June–October 2022, 45 people who use drugs from British Columbia were interviewed to gain an understanding of their perceptions on the upcoming decriminalization exemption, particularly on the proposed threshold of 2.5 grams. A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted to synthesize key themes.

### **Results:**

Four overarching themes emerged: 1) Benefits and drawbacks of the policy; 2) Impact of the 2.5-gram threshold on substance use patterns; 3) Economic implications of adhering to the 2.5-gram threshold; and 4) Impacts of police discretion enforcing the 2.5-gram threshold. Results illustrate the need for the decriminalization exemption policy to consider diversity in consumption patterns and frequency of use among people who use drugs, the inclination to purchase larger quantities of substances for reduced costs and to guarantee a safe and consistent supply, and the role police will play in delineating between possession for personal use or trafficking purposes.

### **Conclusion:**

The findings underscore the importance of monitoring the impact of the threshold on people who use drugs and whether it is contradicting the goals of the policy. Meaningful consultation with people who use drugs can help policymakers understand the challenges they may face when trying to abide by this threshold.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

The authors acknowledge support from the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) (grant # CUG-171602). No pharmaceutical grants were received in the development of this study.