



## MEDIA RELEASE

### DECRIMINALIZATION OF ILLICIT DRUGS UP TO 2.5 GRAMS IS A FIRST STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, SAYS BCFNJC

tkwəlniwt (Westbank), Okanagan Syilx Territory, BC [May 31, 2022]: The BC First Nations Justice Council is pleased with today's announcement regarding the decriminalization of possession of 2.5 grams of personal use drugs but feels that this is only a step in the right direction and not a full solution to addressing the problem.

"Decriminalization is an important step in the right direction in response to the toxic drug crisis unfolding in our communities in recent years that has affected so many of our people and families. Unfortunately, too many of our people have become entangled in the criminal justice system because of addictions. Instead, we should be offering them safe supply and addiction treatment as a caring society," said BCFNJC Chair Doug White, Q.C.

The BCFNJC, through submissions to the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, suggested a personal exemption of up to 4 grams. However, today's announcement of decriminalization of 2.5 grams appears to be focused on the urban context and has not factored in the ongoing crisis in remote communities.

"Addiction has no geographical boundaries. If we are working toward harm reduction by decriminalization to reduce users fear and isolation, the needs of those living in remote communities must also be considered. We hope to see the threshold raised to 4 grams for personal use as soon as possible," added White. "Not only that, consideration needs to be given to those that have been criminalized by the current approach. We must make pardons and criminal record expungement available to them."

A cornerstone of the BC First Nations Justice Strategy, is to reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the legal and jail system. As BCFNJC continues to work with the Provincial and Federal governments to address the needs of the Indigenous people of British Columbia, monitoring the results of this three-year exemption will be key to future change.

#### ABOUT THE BCFNJC

#### BC First Nations Justice Council

The BC First Nations Justice Council has been entrusted with the mandate to transform the justice system and create better outcomes for Indigenous people through implementation of the BC First Nations Justice Strategy.

The strategy, signed March 06, 2020, was jointly developed by the BC First Nations Justice Council, BC First Nations communities and the Province of British Columbia. It includes 43 actions along two paths which involve the reformation of the current system as well as the restoration of First Nations' legal traditions and structures.

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