



CARE NOT COPS & Crackdown: SCRAP BILL 34

Bill 34 is the David Eby NDP plan to cement their legacy as the mass death of people in our communities.

FULL STATEMENT – 10 October 2023

xw̓məθkwəy̓əm, skw̓xwú7mesh & səliwətaɫ lands - In the face of 7 people dying each day across the province, David Eby's BC NDP have announced they intend to implement new legislation that expands the very police powers that have driven the drug toxicity crisis from the start.

The BC NDP's plan to pass Bill 34—2023: Restricting Public Consumption of Illegal Substances Act represents the abandonment of harm reduction as a policy approach, already evident in their lackluster decriminalization framework. Bill 34 would give the police more permanent powers to profile and harass drug users, and confiscate people's substances. It would compel people to use in unsupervised spaces—the BC NDP have not announced plans to concurrently open other supervised sites.

This is occurring as an overdose prevention site in Vancouver is set to be closed down, regulated hydromorphone is being deprescribed, the apparent defunding of the Drug User Liberation Front, while the healthcare system is already in crisis mode, and the drug supply is still becoming increasingly unpredictable. The Union of BC Indian Chiefs immediately came out demanding a different direction. Bill 34 must be scrapped.

"This is yet another example of colonial laws actively attempting to eradicate Indigenous bodies, communities and nations while also enriching police and other appendages of the settler state. Shame on David Eby and his so-called government of reconciliation," says outreach social worker and Métis citizen, Jake Seaby Palmour, RSW.

"From Punjab to BC, colonial governments have imposed prohibition, enforced by police, in attempts to erase the existence of drug users," argues Tyson Singh ਤੈਸੇਨ ਸਿੰਘ Kelsall, a registered social worker and PhD student in the SFU Faculty of Health Sciences, *"Bill 34 and the BC NDP's drug toxicity crisis plan reflect accelerating and completing this settler colonial mission by ensuring we all are dead."*

More than 10,000 people have been killed by the toxic and unpredictable drug supply under BC NDP governance since they took power in 2017. With Bill 34, David Eby is not

only signaling that he and his party do not mind that they have governed over so much premature loss of life, but that they are fully committed to ensuring more people who use drugs will die.

Kat Dockrill, a social work team lead in Vancouver's downtown eastside (DTES) expressed her frustration that, "*David Eby built his personal image portraying himself as a saviour of the DTES—but now that he has the attention he seemingly so badly craved, he has not only abandoned those he stepped on to gain power, he's again proposing punitive and cruel measures that will cause harm across the community.*"

Care Not Cops & Crackdown Podcast members and allies have been among those doing the labour to prevent deaths and other violence from the drug toxicity crisis, while BC's governing party and official opposition have weaponized the emergency as a tool to produce shameful theatrics in bids for electoral power.

"We've seen city councils block safe and welcoming places for people to use drugs, such as in Nelson and Chilliwack, while simultaneously municipalities are complaining to the Premier about public drug use. A report published by the BCAFN (BC Assembly of First Nations) showed that unhoused drug users saw direct links between Prince George's Safe Streets Bylaw and people hiding away to use, and then dying from drug poisoning." says Juls Budău, MSW student at UNBC, "The lack of work done to create more overdose prevention sites, which is mandated by a ministerial order, is quite frankly, cruel."

The BC NDP have so far refused to undercut the supply in any meaningful way. As care workers and/or diverse drug users, this has had profound impacts on our personal and professional lives—the reality that well-funded non-profit organizations and health authorities have done little to resist these regressive changes only adds to our moral distress.

Fraser MacPherson, a registered nurse practicing in Vancouver says, "*The BC NDP and Vancouver Coastal Health have colluded not only to abandon drug users—but to put more power in the hands of police, both in legislation and in their so-called partnerships. VCH-police partnerships are harming people in our community, including people I work with. That VCH and other health authorities have not spoken out against this proposed legislation is a condemnation of their claims to support harm reduction. It's shameful to be silent in the face of legislated mass death.*"

With little proof of being a regular occurrence or of having caused harm, politicians and grifters have generated a panic about people using drugs near children's parks—and are implementing reform well beyond the parameters of playgrounds, to include other spaces, such as apartment building and storefront entrances—collectively making nearly all outdoor consumption illegal and expanding police discretion to socially profile, approach and criminalize people who rely on public space.

The carceral continuum has caused untold harm toward residents in the communities we work and live, and there is more than enough evidence to know that the criminalization of drug users, as well as police interactions make the crisis worse.

Police forces will undoubtedly weaponize this policy change to request increases to their enormous budgets, as they continue to take public resources away from networks of community care, including drug user groups, who struggle for the smallest amounts of funding to keep people alive.

“From daily decampments to the drug toxicity crisis, the BC NDP, the health authorities and the largest organizations in Vancouver’s nonprofit industrial complex have worked together to exclude people living in poverty from public space—and with the acuteness of the drug toxicity crisis, especially—in the most inhumane ways,” says karina czyzewski, a registered clinical social worker in Vancouver.

Care Not Cops & Crackdown Podcast demand that David Eby and the BC NDP immediately reverse course on Bill 34—2023

The BC NDP should instead focus on supporting our communities by scaling up safe supply, with an emphasis on culturally appropriate, non-medicalized options and compassion clubs; open diverse overdose prevention sites in all communities covered by Terry Lake’s ministerial order; ensure adequate access to opioid agonist therapies and methadone maintenance treatment in rural and remote areas of the province; stop expanding or attempting to expand law enforcement scope into social issues; treat the housing crisis with the urgency people deserve; and build up dignified housing with all the ‘tools in the toolbox.’”

