

JHS Canada

Policy for Reduction in the Misuse of Drugs

Preamble

The John Howard Society of Canada recognizes that drug misuse is harmful to health both physically and mentally. While there are some medical circumstances that arise wherein current drugs which are considered illegal may be used to relieve pain and discomfort, generally drug misuse has serious consequences for the individual user.

In determining the response which society takes to try to minimize drug misuse, a variety of strategies could be employed, some of which are mutually exclusive. In determining which strategy should be employed, it is necessary to assess both its potential effectiveness in reducing drug misuse and also its cost to us in the economic, social, and civil and human rights spheres of our lives. The John Howard Society of Canada believes that Canadian society must adopt those methods which have the greatest impact while also experiencing the lowest costs in all three spheres.

Policy Statement

Whereas drug dependence is a chronic relapsing medical condition, and, like other medical conditions, requires treatment based on compassion and respect for the patient and **Whereas** current drug laws and drug enforcement practices frequently magnify the harms associated with drug misuse directly or indirectly by:

- a. supporting a violent, corrupt black market, operated by organized crime which threatens the security of Canadians,
- b. promoting increasingly dangerous forms of drug misuse,
- c. fostering conditions that lead to the rapid spread of AIDS and Hepatitis,
- d. leading those who are dependent on drugs to commit crimes in order to pay the costs of maintaining their habit,
- e. spending billions of dollars without demonstrating substantial effect on the reduction of drug misuse,
- f. impairing the freedom of all Canadians from unnecessary government interference,
- g. prosecutions resulting in hundreds of thousands of Canadians having criminal records which subsequently impairs their ability to earn a living and travel, and
- h. diverting attention from measures that have a higher potential to reduce the harm associated with drug misuse, and

Whereas the incidence of the spread of HIV and Hepatitis through drug misuse has grown dramatically in the community and particularly in the prisons, and

Whereas numerous initiatives, particularly in Europe, have demonstrated that attempts to focus on the reduction of the harm associated with drugs, rather than simply relying on the deterrence of drug use through criminal justice measures, has reduced drug misuse, reduced the spread of AIDS and Hepatitis C, provided for environments for treatment that are more accessible and effective, and assisted many drug addicts reduce or eliminate their misuse of drugs,

THEREFORE, The John Howard Society of Canada supports social policy which attempts to address the problems of individual drug misuse by relying on harm reduction rather than enforcement approaches. Harm reduction approaches to the reduction in drug misuse are characterized as follows:

- a. It is acknowledged that some misuse of mind altering substances is inevitable in today's society,
- b. It is recognized that the drug users decisions to misuse drugs should be neither condemned nor supported, thereby respecting the dignity and rights of the drug users,
- c. The extent of a person's drug misuse is of secondary importance to the harms resulting from their misuse. Measures taken to address the problem should focus primarily on those resulting harms.

Further, the Society supports

- a. Services that assist those who misuse drugs to monitor their physical and mental health,
- b. Services and policies that minimize the social barriers that the drug user might face in maintaining social, employment and community relations,
- c. Voluntary, confidential treatment services,
- d. Practices in prisons which reflect the public health practices that apply in the community generally, and particularly with respect to:
 - i. access to HIV testing,
 - ii. access to equipment and supplies that reduce the spread of diseases, and
 - iii. confidentiality.
- e. The John Howard Society of Canada supports drug enforcement policies that do not themselves contribute to harm.