

Drug Seizure by Police from PWUD in Vancouver



What did we study?

This study aimed to understand how often persons who use drugs (PWUD) in Vancouver have had their drugs seized by police without arrest in 2019-2021.



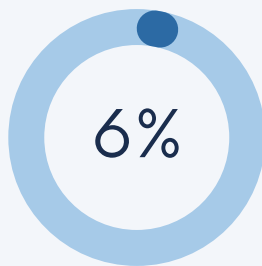
How did we get our data?

We spoke to **995** VIDUS/ACCESS/ARYS participants who reported **daily drug use over 16 months** between 2019-2021.

Additionally, we examined data from 2009-2012.



What did we find?

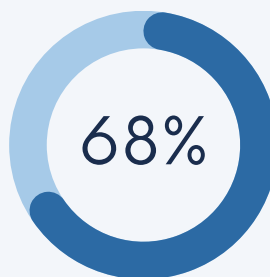


of daily drug users reported having their **drugs seized by police without arrest in 2019 - 2021.***

*within the past 6 months

Who was more likely to report having their drugs seized?

- Those who:
 - have experienced homelessness
 - worked in the unregulated drug market
 - have administered naloxone



of drug users who reported having their drugs seized **immediately obtained new drugs***

*data from 2009-2012

Takeaways

Drug seizures by police from PWUD force PWUD to increase engagement with the unregulated drug market and thereby create health and safety risks, including overdoses. These study findings support calls for ending the policing practice of seizing drugs from PWUD.



What do these findings imply for decriminalization?

Since 2006, the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) has encouraged officers to not arrest/charge people for simple drug possession. This is called depenalization or de facto decriminalization. While the number of simple drug possession charges has indeed decreased in Vancouver, officers can still seize drugs without making any arrests. **Despite concerns among local communities of people who use drugs (PWUD), no statistics existed about this often-undocumented discretionary policing practice.**

We found that in 2019, police drug seizures without arrest occurred more frequently than simple drug possession charges. Reducing charges for simple drug possession surely reduces harms associated with criminal justice involvement among PWUD and broader communities. However, **police drug seizures from PWUD undermines the intended public health and safety benefits of depenalization** because PWUD are forced to increase their interactions with the unregulated drug market by immediately buying new drugs after drug seizures by police.

What are VIDUS, ACCESS, and ARYS?

VIDUS, ACCESS, and ARYS are ongoing open prospective cohort studies of community-recruited people who use unregulated drugs (PWUD) in Vancouver, Canada. The cohorts have contributed to advance health policy and programming for PWUD in Vancouver and beyond.

The **Vancouver Injection Drug Users Study (VIDUS)** is one of the longest-running prospective cohort studies of community-recruited people who inject drugs in the world. Since 1996 VIDUS has enrolled more than 2,600 participants and currently follows HIV-negative people who inject drugs.

Founded in 2005, the **AIDS Care Cohort to Evaluate exposure to Survival Services (ACCESS)** has enrolled and followed approximately 1,000 people living with HIV who use unregulated drugs.

Also founded in 2005, the **At-Risk Youth Study (ARYS)** has enrolled more than 1,500 street-involved youth who use unregulated drugs.

**For more
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