



Canadians told to have two drinks a week, as crack is decriminalised

Description

CANADA: Justin Trudeau's government has introduced some of the strictest guidelines on alcohol consumption in the West, just weeks before Canada will decriminalise heroin and crack cocaine in parts of the country.

The government is recommending Canadians have no more than two drinks per week. The new advice is a steep drop from the previous recommendation of a maximum of 10 drinks a week for women and 15 drinks for men.

No amount of alcohol is safe, says Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addictions (CCSA) in a report published in January. The report concludes "drinking less is better", and if you must drink, two drinks maximum each week is deemed low-risk.

The move puts the country out of step with several other Western nations. The US recommends no more than two drinks a day for men and one for women, while the UK suggests no more than 14 "units" of alcohol – around six glasses of wine, or pints of beer – per week.

New drug policy aims to stem number of overdose deaths

At the same time, Canada has taken steps to liberalise policy on harder drug use.

The government says the decision decriminalising possession of small amounts of cocaine, MDMA and opioids in the western territory has been made in the hopes of stemming its record number of overdose deaths. The policy will take effect on January 31 and apply to drug users over the age of 18.

Advocates of the drug policy reform say decriminalisation is just the first in a long list of major overhauls needed to address Canada's deadly opioid epidemic.

According to Dr Bonnie Henry, British Columbia's health officer, the drug possession policy is an "important step forward to removing that fear and shame and stigma. This is not one single thing that will reverse this crisis, but it will make a difference."

However, critics say the worst-case scenario is it creates an incentive for drugs to be made more potent, thus worsening the opioid crisis.

Some pointed to an inconsistency in the government's approach to lower-class controlled substances.

Alcohol 'largely socially acceptable in Canada'

According to the Global Drug Survey, in drinking frequency, Canada does not rank in the top 10 countries globally, falling below the global average. But on the measure of "feeling drunk", Canada jumped to the sixth spot, just behind the US and the UK.

"Alcohol is largely a part of our culture in Canada, it's normalised, it's largely socially acceptable," Dr Erin Hobin said. "You'll see alcohol at birthdays, weddings or when you're watching Hockey Night in Canada on a Saturday night", she said, referring to the beloved weekly sports programme.

An opinion piece in the Toronto Sun, labelled the guidelines "the latest nanny state lecturing, brought to you by the Trudeau government".

Dan Malleck, a professor and medical historian at Brock University Health Sciences, called the CCSA's assertions about increased risk of drinking alcohol "alarmist and distorting" saying "there is no place for ideologically driven neo-prohibitionist research in the policies of Canada" in an piece published in the The Hamilton Spectator in December 2022.

The final January report also details a variety of health risks associated with alcohol consumption. According to the CCSA, any more than two standard drinks per week brings an increase in negative outcomes, including several types of cancer, heart disease and stroke.

By Josie Ensor, US CORRESPONDENT and Olivia Brask

Category

1. Main
2. NWO-Deep State-Dictatorship-Tyrrany

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