

JOIN OUR NEWSLETTER

B.C. premier says 'zero per cent chance' for no-prescription opioid suggestion

Canadian Press

Jul 12, 2024 12:00 PM

Updated Jul 12, 2024 9:50 PM



B.C. Premier David Eby speaks during an announcement for a kidney hemodialysis unit at Surrey Memorial Hospital in Surrey, B.C., on June 18, 2024. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Ethan Cairns

[Listen to this article](#)

00:03:25

BURNABY, B.C. — British Columbia Premier David Eby says there's a "zero per cent chance" the province will implement recommendations by the provincial health officer that alternatives to opioids and other street drugs be made available without a prescription.

Eby says he has "huge respect" for Dr. Bonnie Henry, who he said saved countless lives during the COVID-19 pandemic, adding that it's OK they occasionally have a difference of opinion.

He told an unrelated Friday news conference his position is "non-negotiable," and B.C. will not be moving to a model where medical professionals are not "directly involved" if people use "harmful and toxic drugs."

Henry said on Thursday that drug prohibition strategies have not only failed to control access to controlled substances but have also created the toxic unregulated drug supply that has killed more than 14,000 people since a health emergency was declared in B.C. eight years ago.

Her report says 225,000 or more people in B.C. are accessing unregulated drugs and fentanyl continues to be the main killer, with 83 per cent of illicit drug deaths linked to the opioid.

Henry says the distribution of safer-supply drugs through prescriptions faces "barriers and challenges" presented by the system's limited capacity, and B.C. cannot prescribe its way out of the crisis.

The report echoes the findings of former chief coroner Lisa Lapointe, who said in January before leaving her post that prescribed safer-supply drugs would not solve the crisis.

Eby said Friday that public health has an important role to play and needs to remain independent.

But he said this isn't their first recommendation that governments have disregarded. He mentioned public health recommendations that speed limits in cities be 30 kilometres an hour and that alcohol prices be increased to reduce health-related harms.

"You'll see from that list that there is a gap on occasion between what the public health official feels would be the best course of action and what is political reality," he said. "We're not going to reduce the speed limits across B.C. to 30 kilometres an hour. That's just not in the cards."

He said it's a government's role to strike a balance between "livability in communities and protecting people."

"I respect and appreciate Dr. Henry's advice, always, (but that) doesn't mean we always take it."

The Conservatives said in a written response to Henry's report Thursday that the party wanted her "immediate dismissal," calling her recommendations "deeply troubling," "shocking" and "irresponsible."

On Friday, Eby drew a contrast between Conservative leader John Rustad's calls for Henry to be fired over the report and his support for public health workers who refused to be vaccinated.

"It's, I think, completely bizarre that he would want to get rid of someone who did such amazing work for us during the pandemic and led us through that, and instead reward the people who refused to get vaccinated," Eby said. "It's a very different and distinct position from ours."

— By Brianna Charlebois in Vancouver

This report by The Canadian Press was first published July 12, 2024.

The Canadian Press
