

Canada to ease drug consumption room rules as opioid deaths rise

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Facing a growing opioid crisis, Canada's Liberal government on Monday removed hurdles to opening new drug-consumption rooms while expanding its fight against narcotics trafficking at the border.

The introduction of legislation paving the way for at least nine new drug consumption sites across Canada and more customs searches for fentanyl comes after 2,000 [overdose deaths](#) in 2015 and predictions of an even higher number this year.

"This will reframe problematic substance use as the public health issue that it is," Health Minister Jane Philpott told a news conference.

Evidence shows that "supervised consumption sites save lives," she said.

Several Canadian cities have looked at opening safe injection sites in recent years, but have been stymied by cumbersome regulations.

The government's bill would repeal 26 application criteria set by the previous Tory administration for opening consumption rooms.

It would also eliminate a size restriction preventing customs officials from inspecting suspicious packages weighing under 30 grams (one ounce).

Highly potent and addictive, the analgesic fentanyl is estimated to be up to 100 times stronger than morphine. The related drug carfentanil is 100 times more powerful than fentanyl.

Two milligrams of pure fentanyl—the size of about four grains of salt—is enough to kill an average-size adult.

Ottawa last month restricted six chemicals used to make fentanyl and partnered with China to stem its flow into the country from abroad.

The record number of fatal overdoses linked to fentanyl has also led to renewed calls for more consumption rooms.

The first North American consumption rooms were established at a clinic in Vancouver in 2003 under a special exemption from federal drug possession and trafficking laws.

It remains the only facility in North America where addicts can receive medical supervision as they inject heroine illegally bought on the street.

Consumption rooms, known in Canada as "supervised injection sites," allow users to inject drugs in a safe and hygienic environment where medical personnel are available and addicts are shielded from police arrest.

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