

A Conversation on Decriminalization and Public Use

Study Session – Union of BC
Municipalities 2023 Conference

September 18, 2023



Ministry of
Mental Health
and Addictions

UBCM 2023 Study Session

Today's Focus

1. Introduction to BC's Mental Health and Substance Use System of Care
2. Decriminalization Overview and Implementation Update
3. Creating Connections to Care
4. Addressing Community Feedback
5. Update from PSSG on Provincial Engagement on Public Substance Use

Introduction

B.C.'s Mental Health and Substance Use System of Care



**Intervening early
so people can
access care
sooner**

By addressing mental health and substance use challenges early, we can get people access to care sooner.



**Reducing risk to
save lives**

B.C. continues to confront the toxic drug crisis through adding new treatment and recovery services, expanding overdose prevention and harm reduction services, and working to end stigma about substance use.



**Connecting people
to care where and
when they need it**

People need to be met with the care they need when they need it. B.C. has been expanding treatment and recovery services to include outreach programs, day treatment, withdrawal management (detox), bed-based treatment and recovery, opioid agonist treatment, and more.



**Creating pathways
to recovery and
wellness so people
can live healthy lives**

The pathway to recovery and ongoing wellness does not end at treatment. B.C. is expanding services so people in recovery can build connections, resiliency and wellness through mutual peer support, life-skills programming, and relapse prevention.

Connecting People to Care

Substance Use Treatment & Recovery Continuum of Care

A **continuum of care** is an integrated, patient-centred approach to care that better supports people across their recovery journey.

A safe space to manage the symptoms of withdrawal.

May be **bed-based** 5 to 7 days) **or outpatient** but always monitored by a healthcare professional.

Withdrawal Management (Detox)*

A safe, temporary bed-based setting for people moving between services.

These are short-term services that **may** last from 24 hours to 30 days.

Stabilization & Transition*

Treatment can take place in a **live-in environment (30-90 days) or at home** through outpatient services. Often includes clinical supports such as counselling, life-skills training, and medical services like OAT.

Supportive Recovery provides low to moderate supports in a live-in environment. Supportive recovery may be accessed after treatment or instead of treatment, depending on a person's needs.

Treatment & Supportive Recovery

Recovery doesn't end after treatment. Aftercare supports help people in community and keep them connected to services like peer support, housing, and employment services.

Ongoing Recovery & Aftercare

Each person's journey is different; not everyone needs a bed-based service. **The journey is not always linear,** but people often start at withdrawal management (detox) and **assessment and care planning are ongoing through the journey.**

The Province is strengthening the continuum of care by adding new approaches like **Road to Recovery**, a seamless model of care that will support same day access to care across different services. **Starting in Vancouver,** the initiative will **expand provincially,** and indicators will be developed as part of the monitoring and evaluation plan.



BC's Decriminalization Framework Overview

Why Decriminalization?



Addiction is a health care issue, not a criminal justice one.



Improve health outcomes and promote pathways to care



Reduce stigma around substance use so people aren't afraid to reach out for help

Decriminalization in BC

- Decriminalization is one critical part of our work to keep people alive and connect them to the care they need.
- Our overall goal is to reduce stigma and break down barriers to care so that people are not afraid to reach out to help.
- The Province's s.56 exemption to the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*, adults (18+) removed criminal penalties for the possession of certain illegal drugs for personal use at or below 2.5g.
- Decriminalization came into force on **January 31, 2023**, and will remain in effect until January 31, 2026.
- Together, the federal and provincial governments are working closely to evaluate and monitor the exemption.

Decriminalization in BC: Key Features



Applies to adults 18+



Inclusive of opioids, crack/powder cocaine, methamphetamine, and MDMA



Police will provide resource cards with information on local supports and will make voluntary referrals



2.5g cumulative threshold amount, with police discretion above



Approaches to unique populations, including Indigenous Peoples and people in rural/remote areas



Robust police training, and monitoring and evaluation framework

NO arrests or seizures for personal possession under the threshold

NO mandatory treatment or diversion

NOT Legalization

Production, import/export, and trafficking remain illegal



Implementation Update

Implementation and Early Outcomes

- The Province is working closely with partners, including health authorities, local governments, Indigenous partners, police, and people with lived and living experience of substance use to implement, monitor and evaluate decriminalization.
- Four key elements we have been monitoring to date are:



**Reducing Stigma:
Experiences of
people who use
drugs**



**Law
enforcement
implementation**



**Health System:
Connections to care
and pathways to
recovery and
wellness**



**Community
feedback**

Reducing Stigma: Experiences of People who use Drugs

Before decriminalization, interview participants saw decriminalization as a step in the right direction, and expressed:



Hope there will be **less stigma** associated with substance use and **better socio-economic opportunities** (e.g., employment) in the future



Hope that they will feel **decreased stress** resulting from reduced criminalization of drug use

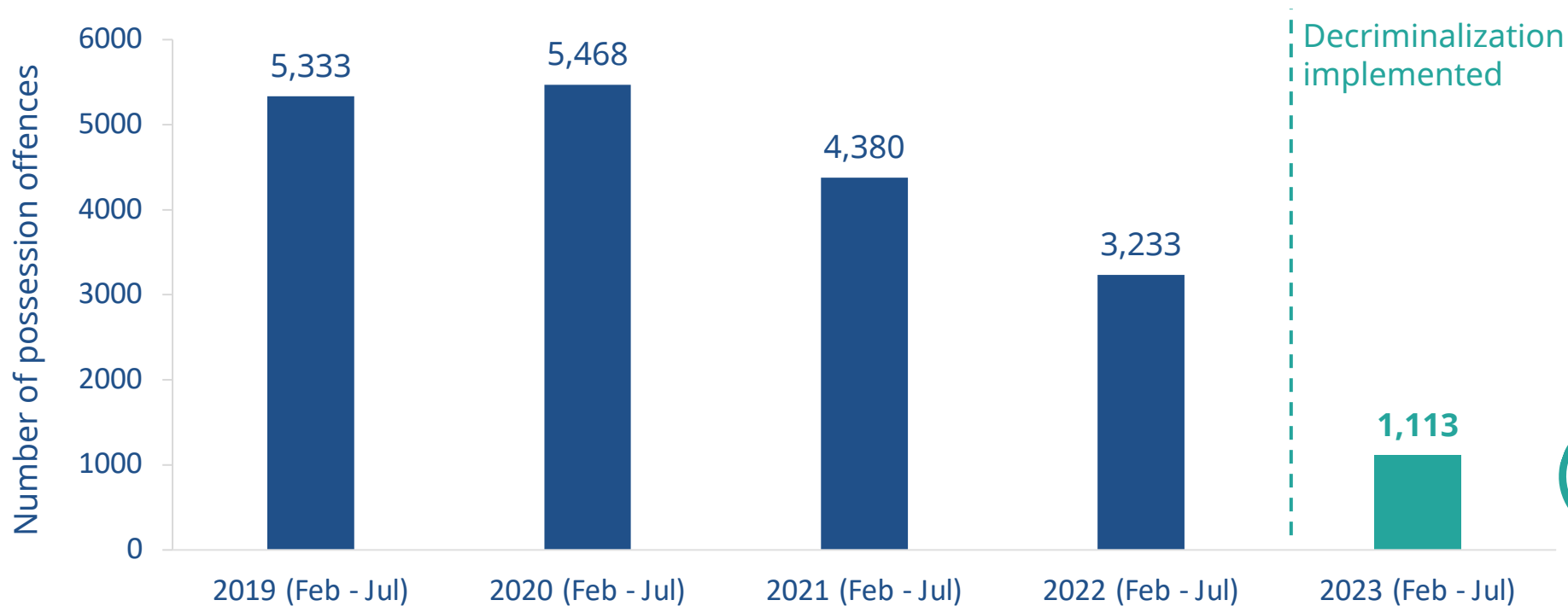


Hope that decriminalization will **improve access** to health and **harm reduction services**

"I was always raised to believe that drugs are evil and they're bad that you're a criminal if you do them. And then I ended up on this road and so then you're always thinking you're bad...a bad person. So, it [decriminalization] might take that stigma that we have on ourselves...where we think we're bad because we use."

Law Enforcement Implementation

Possession offences since decriminalization came into effect



Training Uptake

85% of frontline officers have completed Phase 1 training on decriminalization

In the first six months of decriminalization, there has been a:

76% decrease in possession offences from the past 4-year average during the same February - July period



Substance Use Navigators and Proactive Outreach

Over **200,000 resource cards** with information on health and social services have been distributed to law enforcement partners

Substance Use Navigators

- Non-clinical role
- Local coordination
- Policy change, training, change management, communications in care settings
- Building relationships and providing education with law enforcement partners
- Engagement with other system partners (e.g. CATs, PWUD networks, etc.)

Proactive Outreach Workers

- On-the-ground working in community
- In-person and virtual/phone-based
- Outreach workers:
 - Support referrals and connections to care for PWUD
 - Work with law enforcement to assist with specific clients
- Geographically spread across the Province

Creating Connections to Care



Ministry of
Mental Health
and Addictions

UBCM 2023 Study Session

Connecting People to Care

Substance Use Treatment & Recovery Continuum of Care

A **continuum of care** is an integrated, patient-centred approach to care that better supports people across their recovery journey.

A safe space to manage the symptoms of withdrawal.

May be **bed-based** 5 to 7 days) **or outpatient** but always monitored by a healthcare professional.

Withdrawal Management (Detox)*

A safe, temporary bed-based setting for people moving between services.

These are short-term services that **may** last from 24 hours to 30 days.

Stabilization & Transition*

Treatment can take place in a **live-in environment (30-90 days) or at home** through outpatient services. Often includes clinical supports such as counselling, life-skills training, and medical services like OAT.

Supportive Recovery provides low to moderate supports in a live-in environment. Supportive recovery may be accessed after treatment or instead of treatment, depending on a person's needs.

Treatment & Supportive Recovery

Recovery doesn't end after treatment. Aftercare supports help people in community and keep them connected to services like peer support, housing, and employment services.

Ongoing Recovery & Aftercare

Each person's journey is different; not everyone needs a bed-based service. **The journey is not always linear,** but people often start at withdrawal management (detox) and **assessment and care planning are ongoing through the journey.**

The Province is strengthening the continuum of care by adding new approaches like **Road to Recovery**, a seamless model of care that will support same day access to care across different services. **Starting in Vancouver,** the initiative will **expand provincially,** and indicators will be developed as part of the monitoring and evaluation plan.

Connecting People to Care



Substance Use bed-based Support

B.C. funds substance use beds to support clients to meet recovery goals across various settings, including withdrawal management (detox), supportive recovery, bed-based treatment and transitional beds.

4,167 clients in
2023/2023

unique clients (adults only) were served by *bed-based treatment and supportive recovery beds** in 2022/2023. An increase from 3,679 clients served in 2021/2022.

* not including clients of other substance use beds, specifically, detox and transitional beds
* not including youth

3,277 public beds available

publicly funded community-based adult and youth substance use beds are available across BC, including withdrawal management (detox), supportive recovery, bed-based treatment and transitional beds, as of August 2023.

436 new beds since 2017

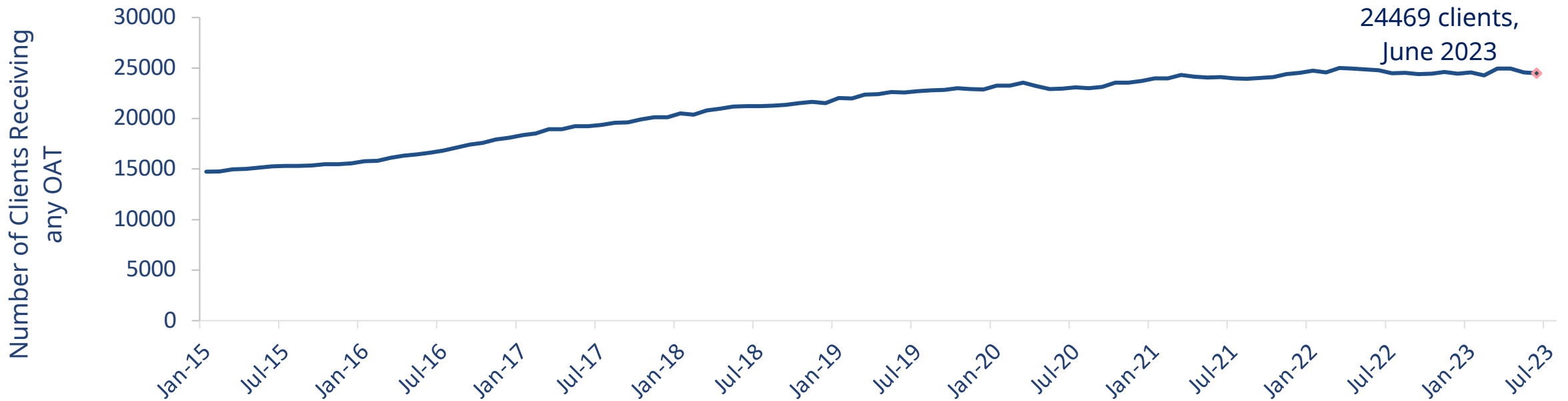
200 FNHA
funded beds
available

which offers a variety of cultural and clinical interventions and support for all genders, youth and families. Ten First Nations treatment and healing centres operate throughout B.C.

BC's Mental Health and Substance Use System of Care

People receiving opioid agonist treatment (OAT)

OAT helps reduce the risk of death. The reach of OATs has increased over time through expanding the medications covered, reducing costs, and expanding who can prescribe OATs. There were 24,469 OAT clients in June 2023.



Connecting People to Care

Recovery Community Centres (RCCs)

RCCs offer a place for people who use substances to share, belong, and heal. Clients of The Junction have access to a variety of low-barrier recovery supports.

Vancouver's RCC, The Junction, is new but already serving many clients and offering a wide variety of recovery-oriented supports. Since November 2022, the Junction has seen:



400+ clients signed up for recovery supports and services



85+ clients accessing 1:1 counselling



425 groups and activities have been offered

Connecting People to Care

Concurrent Disorders Treatment at Red Fish Healing Centre

Red Fish Healing Centre is a 105-bed facility, which is designed for people with the most complex and concurrent mental health and addiction challenges. Red Fish treats mental health and addictions together and research shows that this can result in better outcomes for people because each affects the other. Through Budget 2023, the Red Fish model of care will be expanded so more people will have access to treatment closer to home.



Red Fish Healing Centre is highly utilized, with an average occupancy rate of 95%, indicating a sustained, high demand for this type of service.



A total of 214 clients were admitted to Red Fish in 2022/23.



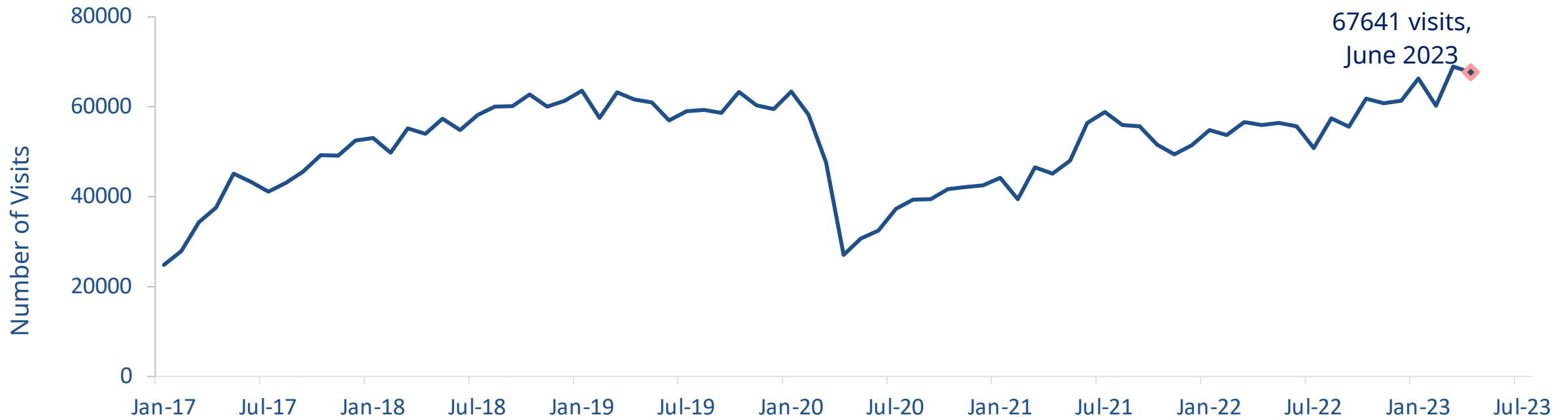
95% of Red Fish clients reported improved mental health between admission and discharge.

Connecting People to Care



Visits to Overdose Prevention and Supervised Consumption Sites

B.C. has rapidly expanded access to overdose prevention services, as well as inhalation services, in communities hardest hit by the drug-poisoning crisis.

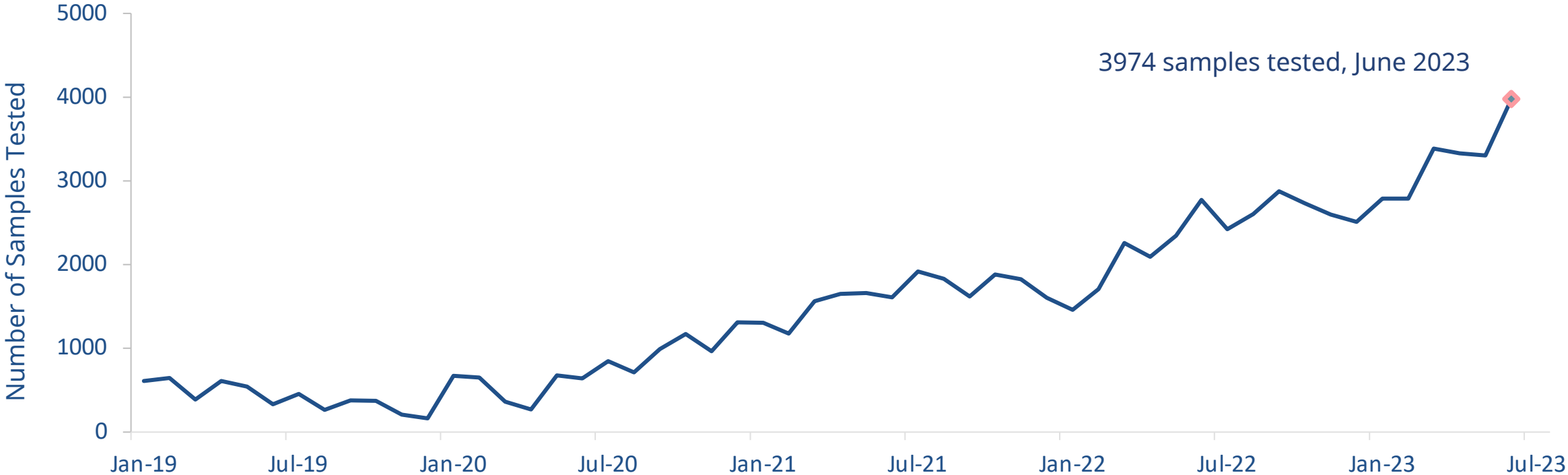


Connecting People to Care



Drug Checking Utilization

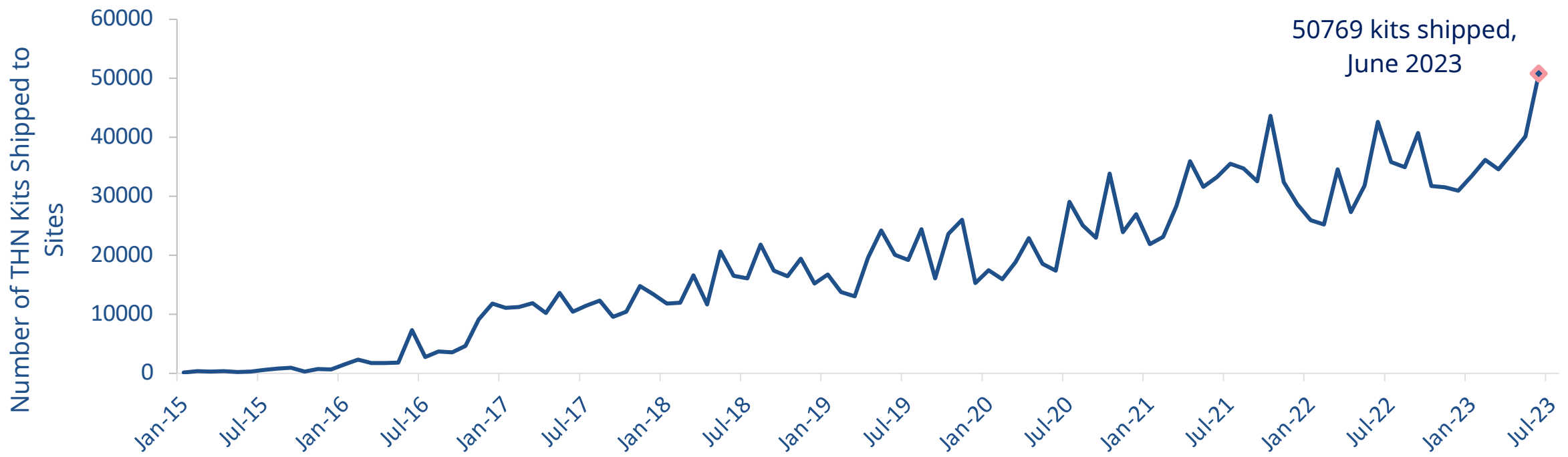
The number of drug samples tested in BC has steadily increased since 2019.



BC's Mental Health and Substance Use System of Care

Demand for Take Home Naloxone (THN)

The number of THN kits shipped to sites have steadily increased since January 2019. BC experienced its highest-ever demand for THN kits with 50769 kits shipped in June 2023.



Addressing Community Feedback

- Some people have raised concerns about possession of illegal drugs in spaces used by children. The Province is committed to balancing the complementary goals of **public health**, **public safety** and **other community interests** and ensuring that we are meeting our goals of keeping people alive and connecting them to the care they need.
- To that end, the Province has:

Secured an amendment to the federal exemption to prohibit possession of illegal drugs in certain child-focused areas.

Undertaken policy and engagement work to for new provincial legislation to further regulate public drug use this fall.

Amendment to the Exemption

- At the Province's request, Health Canada has agreed to amend the exemption to **prohibit** possession of illegal drugs within 15 metres of the following settings:
 - Playgrounds
 - Spray pools (commonly known as splash pads, spray parks) and wading pools
 - Skate parks
- The amendment is now in effect.
- Police will maintain their ability to use discretion with respect to enforcement of the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* in instances where an individual is found in possession in the above settings.
- The amendment will complement forthcoming provincial public use legislation.

Looking Ahead

- MMHA and UBCM to continue to convene the decriminalization Local Government Working Group that has been meeting since October 2022, and will continue to engagement local government partners throughout term of the exemption.
- Local governments will be invited to offer their perspectives on the implementation of decriminalization in their communities as part of the Province's **implementation evaluation**.

For More Information



Contact Us:

- Christine Massey, DM, Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions
Christine.Massey@gov.bc.ca
- Ally Butler, ADM Treatment and Recovery, Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions
Ally.Butler@gov.bc.ca

Find out more in the complete *Building a Mental Health and Substance Use System of Care: Data Snapshot* at: MentalHealthAndAddictionsCare.gov.bc.ca



Thank you.