



PROVINCE-WIDE SAVE OUR STREETS SURVEY SHOWS BRITISH COLUMBIANS WANT MORE ACTION AND NEW APPROACHES TO ADDRESS ADDICTION, PUBLIC SAFETY AND RETAIL CRIME

Research Co. poll shows widespread dissatisfaction with criminal justice system

VANCOUVER, B.C. (September 24, 2024) – With less than one month to go before British Columbia’s provincial election, a province-wide survey commissioned by Save Our Streets is providing convincing data that residents across the province don’t feel safe in their communities and don’t believe the justice system, federal government, provincial government, municipal governments or the police are doing enough to respond to addiction and mental health issues in their community.

Fifty-five per cent of respondents said the level of criminal activity in their community has increased, while 88 per cent said they believe additional crimes go unreported in the province, due most significantly to a lack of confidence in the justice system (68%). With 50 per cent of respondents saying they fear for their safety and almost three-in-four (74%) saying crime and violence are impacting the quality of life in their community, respondents overwhelming indicated they are willing to support new approaches by police, the justice system and all levels of government to address opioid consumption, retail crime and public safety.

The online survey of a representative sample 1,200 British Columbians was conducted from September 9 to 12 by Research Co. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 2.8 percentage points, nineteen times out of twenty.

“As we get ready to head for the polls, we thought it was important to reach out to British Columbians to hear directly from them about how they’re being impacted by these issues,” said Jess Ketchum, Co-Founder of Save Our Streets. “As disheartening as these results may appear at first glance, the good news is residents across the province have clearly stated that they are open to new ideas and willing to support new and expanded approaches to tackle crime, reform our justice system and provide effective treatment and recovery options for people suffering from addiction and mental illnesses.”

Key findings:

Crime / public safety

- 55% said the level of criminal activity in their community has increased in the past four years.
- 88% said they believe crimes go unreported in the province, due to lack of confidence in the justice system (68%), reporting crime being too much of a hassle for victims (50%), lack of confidence in the police (47%) and fear of retribution (38%).
- Almost three-in-four (74%) said crime and violence are impacting the quality of life in their community.
- 50% fear for their own safety in their community. Slightly larger proportions fear for the safety of their friends (52%) and family (57%).
- 58% said there are areas in their community that they avoid because they fear for their safety.
- 61% of respondents said they have confidence in the police to properly deal with crime and public safety in their community, followed by the provincial government (45%), their municipal government (43%), the justice system (38%), and federal government (36%).
- 61% said the justice system in B.C. does not achieve the appropriate balance between the rights of offenders and those of victims.

Retail

- 67% said there has been an increase in shoplifting in B.C. in the past three years, along with an increase in random vandalism, such as broken windows (60%), violence against employees (45%) and consumer-facing employees leaving positions because they fear for their safety (44%).
- 80% think retail crime makes the products they buy more expensive.
- 87% are calling for all levels of government to do more to prevent acts of violence against employees, as well as random vandalism (85%), employees leaving consumer-facing positions (83%) and shoplifting (81%).

Addiction

- 67% described the use of prescription and non-prescription opioid drugs in their community as a major problem.
- 82% of respondents consider addiction to opioids to be a health issue.
- 75% agree with the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions' proposed guidelines for involuntary treatment: individuals "suffering from a mental disorder that seriously impairs (their) ability to react appropriately to (their) environment or to associate with others," individuals who "require psychiatric treatment in or through a designated facility" and individuals who are "not suitable as voluntary patients."

Responsibility

- When asked "Which level of government do you think is most responsible for dealing with crime and public safety?", 40% said the provincial government, 27% said municipal governments and 23% said the federal government.
- 66% said the justice system is not doing enough to respond to addiction and mental health issues in their community. They also said the federal government (66%), provincial government (61%), their municipal government (60%) and police (49%) are not doing enough.
- 88% of respondents said addiction and mental health issues are to blame for the current situation regarding crime and public safety in their community. Other factors blamed for the situation included poverty and inequality (81%), gangs/the illegal drug trade (79%), inadequate court system (76%), bad economy/unemployment (72%), lack of values/improper education for youth (69%), insufficient policing/lack of resources to combat crime (67%).

Approaches – Crime and Public Safety

- 87% support modifying the bail system to ensure repeat offenders remain in custody while awaiting trial.
- 87% support establishing harsher penalties, including incarceration for individuals convicted of multiple offenses.
- 86% support increased police presence in their community where drugs are being sold illegally.
- 85% support the federal government re-deploying police forces to Canada's ports to tackle transnational organized crime.
- 83% support new legislation to allow for confiscating assets of people convicted of drug trafficking offences.
- 70% support the provincial government providing financial support to businesses affected by crime, anti-social behaviour or civil disorder, such as shoplifting, graffiti or vandalism.

Approaches – Prescription and non-prescription opioid drugs

- 83% support investing in new and enhanced facilities for people experiencing mental health problems.
- 83% support launching more education and awareness campaigns about drug use.
- 81% support creating more spaces for drug rehabilitation.
- 79% support providing available housing units to individuals who are committed to entering and concluding a detoxification and recovery program.
- 77% support reducing the prescription of opioids by medical professionals.
- 73% support allowing people addicted to opioids who have been charged with relatively minor crimes to avoid fines and incarceration if they voluntarily enter and conclude a detoxification and recovery program.
- 73% support establishing a publicly available “data dashboard”, showing real-time statistics related to individuals in treatment, as well as the number and location of available beds.
- 63% support establishing “safe supply” programs, where alternatives to opioids can be prescribed by health professionals.
- 53% support setting up more “harm reduction” strategies, such as legal supervised injection sites.
- Only 38% supported decriminalizing all drugs for personal use.

On January 23, Save Our Streets will host the Communities Driving Change Forum in Vancouver, where panels of experts and community leaders will explore how we can better address the many issues related to mental health, addictions and crime, including judicial reform, policing reform, addictions and the mental illnesses continuum of care, and housing. B.C.’s provincial party leaders are being invited to speak and the Forum will be livestreamed.

About Save Our Streets

Save Our Streets is a coalition of 100-plus community and business organizations representing every corner of British Columbia. SOS members are committed to seeing governments bring order and public safety back to communities across British Columbia. Concerned citizen groups, and B.C. businesses interested in joining or supporting SOS are invited to submit online at SaveOurStreets.ca or contact info@saveourstreets.ca.

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