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Alex Betsos, Harm Reduction from British Columbia through Canada

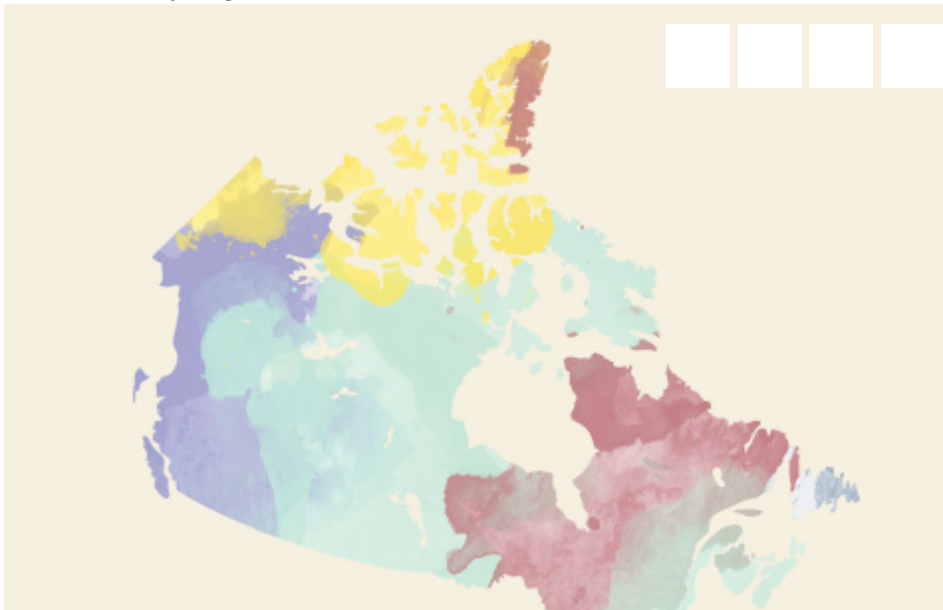
Scott Douglas Jacobsen and friend and colleague, Alex Betsos, discuss harm reudction in British Columbia and Canada, as well as Karmik and CSSDP.

August 1, 2017 by [Scott Douglas Jacobsen](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

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Alex Betsos is a friend, and colleague through [Karmik](#) and [Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy](#), where I am a [Member-at-Large for Outreach](#) and Alex is an [International Representative](#) on the Board of Directors. Here is an interview with Alex about harm reduction, an educational interview. I trust this helps.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: We met a few months back, last year in fact. Gonzo Nieto, who is a prominent – lots of press in the Canadian news – and well-spoken member of the community, recommended you to me.

You and I had some time, a few months back, to discuss harm reduction and the national organization of students for harm reduction and “sensible drug policy,” called Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy (CSSDP).

You work for Karmik, which is a west coast harm reduction initiative. You’ve been deeply involved with the CSSDP and Karmik, and

We conducted a short interview, which didn't cover enough of your expertise a few months ago. So here we are, and I apologize for having to ask this, but it is an educational interview, what is harm reduction?

Alex Betsos: Harm reduction, in its most basic form, is an acknowledgment that life contains risks, and in order to lessen the likelihood of risks, we take certain precautions. Looking both ways when crossing the street or putting on a helmet are all harm reduction tactics.

Jacobsen: How does harm reduction, as a philosophy, influence Canadian drug policy?

Betsos: Harm reduction offers opportunities in Canadian drug policy, but it's always a bit tenuous. We're fortunate to have a government right now that acknowledges the importance of harm reduction even though sometimes it's just lip-service. It's important to note that harm reduction in Canada is frequently couched in the four pillars model, which allows parliamentarians to continue prohibitionist thinking with certain appeasements to harm reduction practices and ethos.

Jacobsen: With the National Anti-Drug Strategy of the Harper, launched in 2006, renewed in 2012 and 2014, the emphasis appeared to be more on enforcement. What is the evidence?

We need enforcement, but we need treatment and prevention. The previous Prime Minister Harper said, "If you're addicted to drugs, we'll help you, but if you deal drugs, we'll punish you." What is the ideal apportioning of funding for the substance use and misuse (or abuse) in Canada?

Betsos: First, the question assumes that keeping drugs illegal is a desirable thing. Ideally, enforcement would be downplayed, and some adaptation of a public health approach to drug distribution would be the real step.

If we have to keep some prohibitionist model, putting resources into harm reduction and treatment would be more useful allocations of this money, and to some degree prevention, however, I would point out that harm reduction can encompass part of prevention.

Betsos: There are lots. Each region has its own health authority, and within that, there are a variety of harm reduction organizations.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the time, my friend – take care.

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About Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen founded In-Sight Publishing and In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal. He works as an Associate Editor and Contributor for Conatus News, Editor and Contributor to The Good Men Project, a Board Member, Executive International Committee (International Research and Project Management) Member, and as the Chair of Social Media for the Almas Jiwani Foundation, Executive Administrator and Writer for Trusted Clothes, and Councillor in the Athabasca University Students' Union. He contributes to the Basic Income Earth Network, The Beam, Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy, Check Your Head, Conatus News, Humanist Voices, The Voice Magazine, and Trusted Clothes. If you want to contact Scott: Scott.D.Jacobsen@Gmail.com; website: www.in-sightjournal.com; Twitter: https://twitter.com/InSight_Journal.

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