

The J  
Healthcare  
Initiative

Empowering drug users'  
healthcare choices

# From Crisis to compassion Switzerland vs. Canada's Drug Policy Revolution

Swipe to learn more





# Switzerland: 1980s

Faced severe heroin epidemic and HIV crisis. Open drug scenes in cities like Zurich  
Public health emergency declared (Csete, 2010)

**Swipe for more**



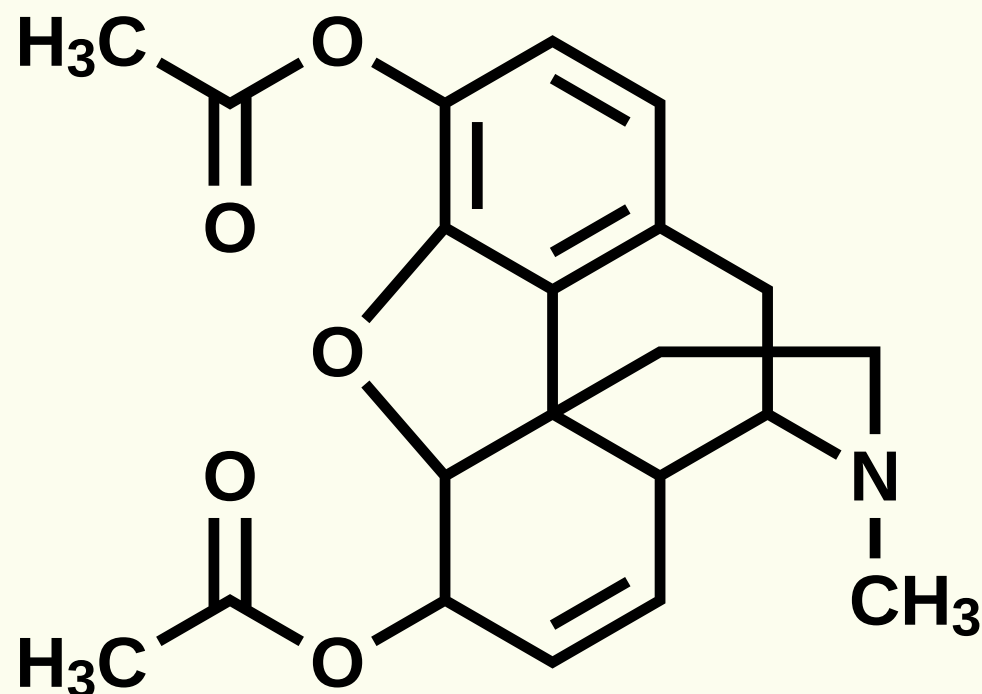


## Canada: 1980s

Rising drug use, but less severe than Switzerland. Focus on law enforcement and abstinence-based approaches. Limited harm reduction initiatives (Fischer, 2000)

**Swipe for more**





# Switzerland: 1994

Launched heroin-assisted treatment (HAT) trials. Pioneered supervised injection facilities. Shifted to harm reduction and public health approach (Uchtenhagen, 2010)

**Swipe for more**



The J  
Healthcare  
Initiative

Empowering drug users'  
healthcare choices



## Canada: 2003

First supervised injection site, Insite, opened in Vancouver. Faced legal challenges and political opposition. Gradual shift towards harm reduction (Wood et al., 2004)

**Swipe for more**





# Switzerland: 2008

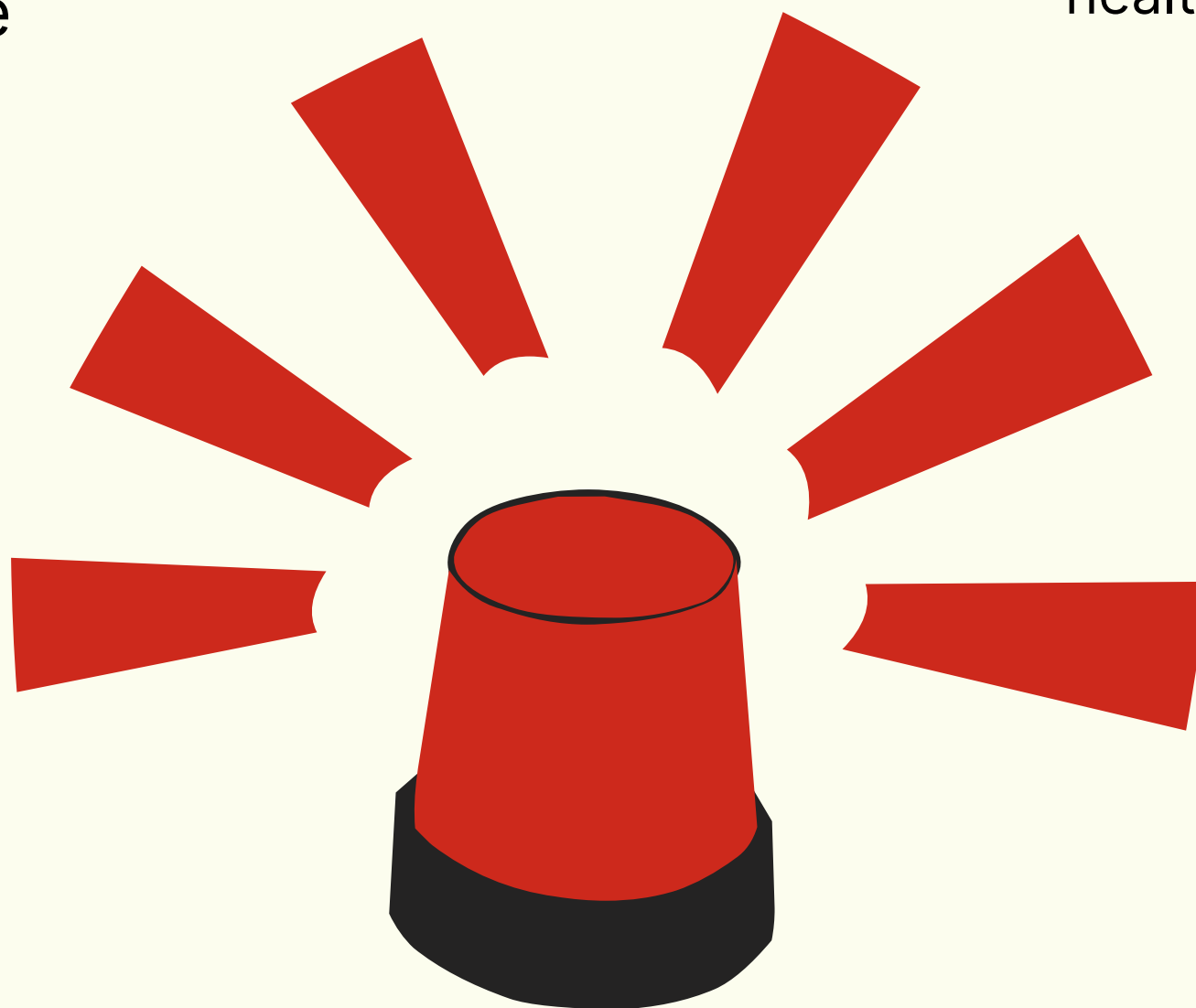
Prescribed heroin becomes permanent part of Swiss health system. Dramatic reduction in overdose deaths and crime. Model for evidence-based drug policy (Rehm et al., 2001)

**Swipe for more**



The J  
Healthcare  
Initiative

Empowering drug users'  
healthcare choices



# Canada: 2016

Opioid crisis declared a public health emergency. Started opening more supervised consumption sites. Overall very low capacity for safer supply programs (Government of Canada, 2021)

**Swipe for more**

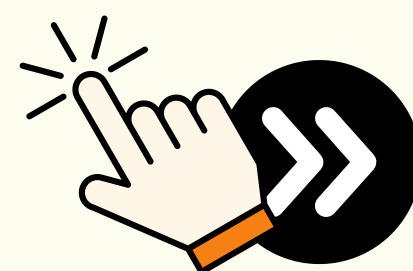




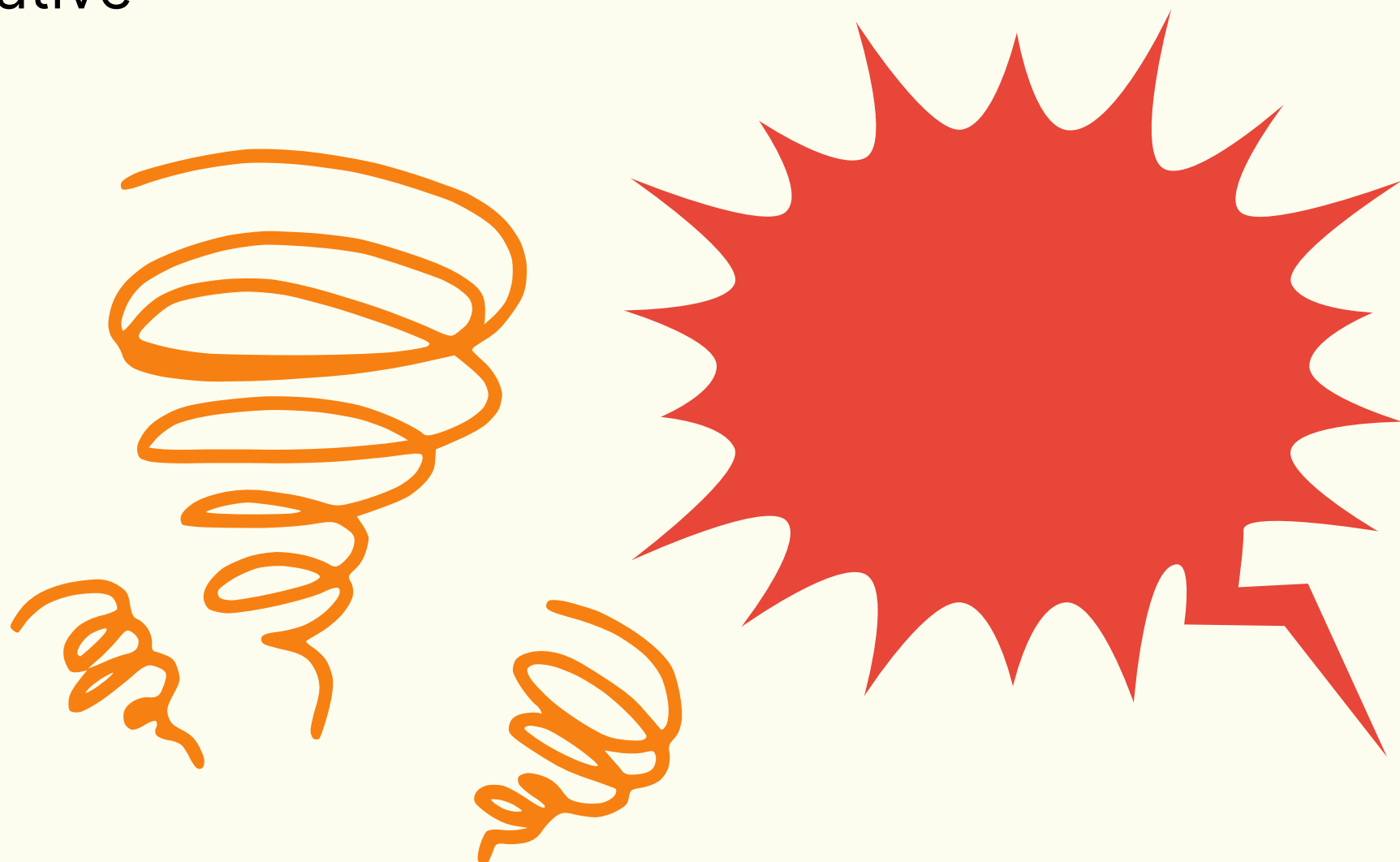
# Switzerland: 2020

Continued low rates of problematic drug use. Integrated treatment and social support systems. Exploring cannabis regulation (Falcatto et al., 2021)

**Swipe for more**





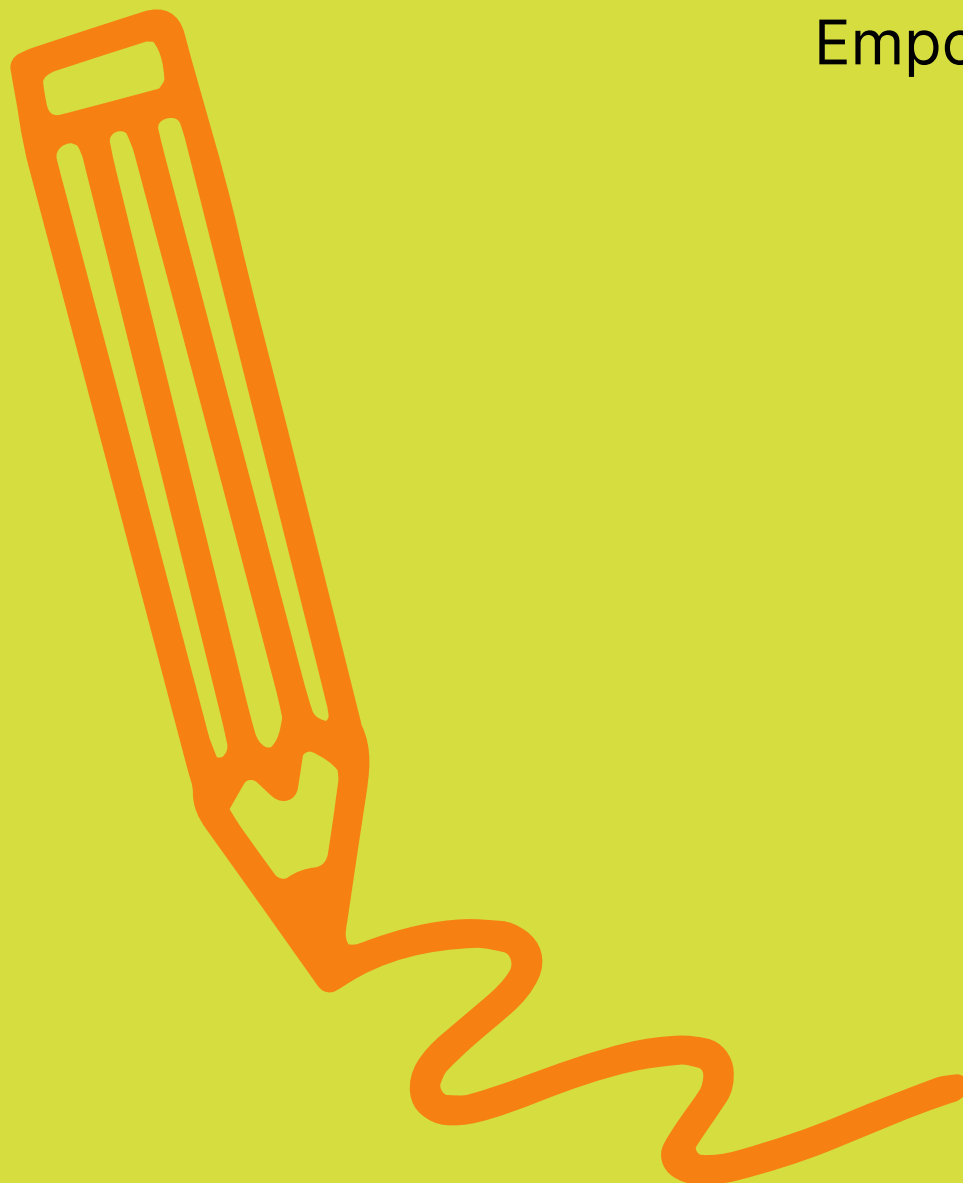


# Canada: 2023

Decriminalization pilot in one province. Ongoing challenges with toxic drug supply. Moral panic. Debates on scaling up safer supply programs (Health Canada, 2023)

**Swipe for more**





# Key Takeaways

Switzerland's early embrace of harm reduction yielded dramatic public health gains. Meanwhile, Canada's evolving approach, though progressive, remains hampered by inconsistent political backing and societal fears, limiting its full potential and scale.

**Swipe for more**



# References

1. Csete, J. (2010). From the mountaintops: What the world can learn from drug policy change in Switzerland. Open Society Foundations.
2. Fischer, B. (2000). Prescriptions, power and politics: The turbulent history of methadone maintenance in Canada. *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 21(2), 187-210.
3. Uchtenhagen, A. (2010). Heroin-assisted treatment in Switzerland: A case study in policy change. *Addiction*, 105(1), 29-37.
4. Wood, E., Kerr, T., Lloyd-Smith, E., Buchner, C., Marsh, D. C., Montaner, J. S., & Tyndall, M. W. (2004). Methodology for evaluating Insite: Canada's first medically supervised safer injection facility for injection drug users. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 1(1), 9.
5. Rehm, J., Gschwend, P., Steffen, T., Gutzwiller, F., Dobler-Mikola, A., & Uchtenhagen, A. (2001). Feasibility, safety, and efficacy of injectable heroin prescription for refractory opioid addicts: a follow-up study. *The Lancet*, 358(9291), 1417-1423.
6. Government of Canada. (2021). Opioid- and Stimulant-related Harms in Canada. Public Health Agency of Canada.
7. Falcato, L., Bernath, C., Salis Gross, C., Bessler, C., Dey, M., Hungerbühler, I., ... & Schaub, M. P. (2021). The future of drug policy in Switzerland. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 94, 103176.
8. Health Canada. (2023). Subsection 56(1) class exemption for adults in the province of British Columbia to possess small amounts of certain illegal drugs for personal use. Government of Canada.