

NEWS RELEASE

Beyond the Blues to feature cannabis use check-ups at mental health events

Vancouver, BC - (September 20, 2019): As we approach the one-year anniversary of the legalization of recreational marijuana in British Columbia, a new cannabis use self-test is being offered at a number of Beyond the Blues events taking place throughout the province this October.

The Cannabis Reality Check is a 4-question, non-judgmental cannabis use self-test reflecting lower-risk cannabis use guidelines developed for Canadians. Sensitive to age-related factors, the questionnaire reflects on possible benefits of use but also helps people look at risks and possible harms. Participants then have a private debrief interview with a supportive clinician to interpret the findings and figure out next steps and local resources. The self-test was developed by the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research and relates to cannabis use not covered by a medical prescription.

“The questionnaire is a brief educational tool to help participants reflect on their relationship with cannabis,” says Sarah Hamid-Balma with the Canadian Mental Health Association’s BC Division and provincial coordinator for Beyond the Blues. “The answers to the questions can draw attention to issues that might be affecting their well-being and to ways they can better manage their lives and mental health.”

Held during or near Mental Illness Awareness Week (October 6-12), Beyond the Blues is an annual awareness day to encourage people to learn more about mental well-being and mental health problems. There are at least 75 events set up across BC. Beyond the Blues: Education & Screening Days, have helped 102,000 people across BC since 1995.

Beyond the Blues events are free, anonymous, confidential and drop-in. At an education and screening site attendees can take part in fun and engaging activities such as videos, games, presentations, or resource fairs to learn more about stress, mood and anxiety problems, supports and self-care. In addition to cannabis, attendees can fill out short self-tests on depression, anxiety and risky drinking. They can also fill out a well-being self-test that look at features of good mental health like vitality, social support, healthy thinking, and self-esteem.

“Talking about mental health or substance use can be difficult for many people, but the self-tests used at the events are a great opening to reflection and conversation,” says Hamid-Balma. “Beyond the Blues is about prevention, catching problems early and connecting to local help in a fun, friendly and interactive way.”

“We want to create friendly, engaging, and safer spaces for people to reflect on their own mental health and have a conversation about how to prevent problems or feel better,” says Hamid-Balma. “We want Beyond the Blues attendees to leave feeling empowered, better informed, hopeful and supported.”

There are specially-tailored screening forms available for adults, older adults, youth, new or expectant mothers, Indigenous adults and people who are concerned about a friend or family member. Brief substance use screens also help people see the links between their alcohol or other drug use, possible harms, and impacts on their mental well-being.

“Our research shows anyone can benefit from attending,” says Hamid-Balma. “The information and activities are designed to support people in educating themselves so that they can see what’s going well for them, and also know what to do next if they or someone they care about *is* affected down the road.”

To see all 75+ BC events in October and beyond, please visit www.heretohelp.bc.ca/beyond-the-blues

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**NOTE TO MEDIA ABOUT VISUALS: Media are asked not to attend these events for photos or interviews to respect the anonymity and confidentiality of attendees. For visuals, see stock photos of a person filling out a screen online at www.heretohelp.bc.ca/about/media or contact your local site planner to see about getting photos/footage before the event day, such as of shots of displays or speakers; or having a journalist go through a mock screening interview.*

About our Supporters: CMHA BC works with the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research to support local events. Funding for provincial coordination of Beyond the Blues has been provided by BC Mental Health and Substance Use Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, with additional support from the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Special thanks also to provincial media sponsor Black Press, and to our vast list of provincial endorsing agencies.

About the Canadian Mental Health Association BC Division (CMHA BC): CMHA BC is a part of Canada’s most established mental health charity and the nation-wide leader and champion for mental health. CMHA helps people access the resources they need to maintain and improve mental health, build resilience, and support recovery from mental illness. Each year in BC alone, CMHA serves more than 100,000 people all across the province.

About HeretoHelp: CMHA BC is proud to be affiliated with HeretoHelp. HeretoHelp is a project of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information, a group of non-profit agencies providing good-quality information to help individuals and families maintain or improve their mental well-being. The BC Partners are funded by BC Mental Health and Substance Use Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority.

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