



## Oregon becomes first state to decriminalize hard drugs like heroin and cocaine

*Possession of small amounts of drugs is decriminalized*

November 4, 2020

Paul Best

Oregon became the first state to decriminalize hard drugs like heroin, cocaine and meth in a 59-41% vote as of early Wednesday morning, according to the Associated Press.

The "Drug Addiction Treatment and Recovery Act" will transition Oregon's drug policy from a punitive, criminal approach to "a humane, cost-effective, health approach."

"People suffering from addiction are more effectively treated with health care services than with criminal punishments," the bill reads. "A health care approach includes a health assessment to figure out the needs of people who are suffering from addiction, and it includes connecting them to the services they need."

Instead of treating drug users as criminals, Oregon will now offer them addiction services funded by marijuana tax revenue, which is more than \$100 million a year in the state.

Only small amounts of drugs are decriminalized, such as less than 1 gram of heroin or MDMA; 2 grams of cocaine or methamphetamine; 12 grams of psilocybin mushrooms; and 40 doses of LSD, oxycodone or methadone.

Criminal penalties for possession of these amounts are replaced with a fine of up to \$100, which can be waived if the user is evaluated at Addiction Recovery Centers.

Crimes that are associated with drug use, such as manufacturing drugs, selling drugs and driving under the influence, are still criminal offenses.

More than 100 organizations endorsed the measure, including the Oregon Chapter of the American College of Physicians, Oregon Nurses Association, Oregon School Psychologists' Association, Oregon Academy of Family Physicians, the ACLU and others.

There was also a fair amount of opposition to the measure, with two dozen district attorneys in the state saying the measure "recklessly decriminalizes possession of the most dangerous types of drugs (and) will lead to an increase in acceptability of dangerous drugs."

Multiple countries in Europe, including Portugal, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, have decriminalized hard drugs without rampant negative effects.

Portugal decriminalized all drugs in 2001, which did not lead to an increase in drug use, but did result in a dramatic reduction of pathologies associated with drug use, such as sexually transmitted diseases and overdose deaths, according to a 2009 Cato Institute study.

A 2015 European Drug Report also found that Portugal's drug overdose death rate is five times lower than the European Union average.