

Consensus statement on cannabis research in Canada

Recent years have witnessed increased use of cannabis for medical and non-medical purposes, as well as widespread recognition that cannabis prohibition has been a practical failure with significant adverse social and health consequences. The Government of Canada's recently unveiled Cannabis Act proposes to legalize adult cannabis use for non-medical purposes beginning in July 2018, and thus presents a valuable opportunity to reevaluate the societal and personal consequences of cannabis use, and mandates a new approach to cannabis research.

Under prohibition, cannabis research has been limited by the criminalization and stigmatization of cannabis use, an overemphasis on pathologizing cannabis use, and by restricted access to cannabis for human research. As a result, substantial knowledge gaps remain related to the potential consequences of legalized cannabis use. A growing number of countries, including Canada, are moving towards legalizing cannabis use or employing alternative regulatory approaches. These regulatory shifts require a public health approach to better understand cannabis users and use patterns, assess population health, and provide evidence to guide health and social policy and action. Now is the time to ensure biomedical, epidemiological, and social science cannabis research is prioritized; supported with adequate funding; and facilitated through reduced administrative barriers. Specifically, as researchers focused on drugs and drug policy, we call on elected officials and other policy makers in Canada to:

- Support a public health approach to cannabis research focused on potential benefits as well as harms;
- Support cannabis research focused on the impact of cannabis use on the use of other substances, and related harms and benefits;
- Create mechanisms for university, community, and clinical researchers to produce, possess, and use cannabis and cannabinoids for research purposes;
- Create and support dedicated and distinct funds for medical and non-medical cannabis research;
- Support the formation and functioning of distinct networks of researchers focused on medical and non-medical cannabis throughout Canada.