

Over the next few months, CMHA Ontario will be sending out regular informational newsletters regarding the transition to cannabis legalization and regulation leading up to the first legal day of sales. Included in this newsletter will be information about the current legislation, resources, tool-kits, and up to date evidence regarding cannabis and the links to mental health.

If you have any questions, or have any suggestions or requests for specific information related to cannabis, please contact Jean Hopkins, Policy Analyst, at jhopkins@ontario.cmha.ca

Medical Cannabis in Canada

While the content of this newsletter will focus predominantly on recreational cannabis, it is important to provide an overview of the medical cannabis system and how the medical/recreational systems differ.

The [Marihuana for Medical Purposes Act](#) was introduced in 2001 and allowed individuals with a medical license to access quality-controlled dried marijuana produced under secure and sanitary conditions. This was expanded to the [Access to Cannabis for Medical Purposes Act](#) in 2016, which allows for growth at home, and the regulation of cannabis oils. In Canada there are approximately 200,000 medical cannabis patients and this number has been increasing. While people may be prescribed cannabis for a broad range of health concerns, [sufficient evidence exists](#) on the use of cannabis to treat end-of-life pain, chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, and spasticity due to multiple sclerosis or spinal cord injury. Medical cannabis can be purchased from a licensed producer can be made online, by a written order, or through telephone, and are delivered by mail and only licensed producers are authorized to produce, sell, and mail cannabis to the public. "Dispensaries" or "compassion clubs" are not allowed to sell cannabis for medical or non-medical purposes and will be subject to [harsh fines](#) under the new legislation.

Medical cannabis will continue to be subject to different rules and regulations than recreational cannabis after legalization.

Continued next page ►►

Cannabis and Harm Reduction Information

Harm Reduction is an evidence-based, client-centered approach that seeks to reduce the health and social harms associated with substance use. Included in the harm reduction approach is a series of programs, services and practices. Essential to a harm reduction approach is that it provides people who use substances a choice of how they will minimize harms through non-judgmental and non-coercive strategies in order to enhance skills and knowledge to live safer and healthier lives.

- 1) The Canadian Public Health Association has developed a list of harm reduction and stigma related resources specifically as it relates to cannabis, which can be found [here](#).
- 2) Included in the CPHA list is the Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines (LRCUGS). In 2017, the [Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse \(CRISM\)](#), published the [Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines \(LRCUG\)](#), an evidence-based public health intervention tool. The LRCUG provide 10 science-based recommendations on how to reduce the risks and harms associated with cannabis use for non-medical reasons.
- 3) [Pathways Research](#) has developed a cannabis workbook for people looking to lower the health risks from cannabis use.
- 4) The Canadian Nurses Association developed a discussion paper on [Harm Reduction for Non-Medical Cannabis Use](#).

Cannabis and Impaired Driving

Driving under the influence of substances, including cannabis, contributes to fatal road crashes. Young Canadians (ages 15–24) were more than twice as likely as older Canadians to report driving after using cannabis. In 2017, a Health Canada survey showed that many people are unaware of the potential risks of cannabis-impaired driving. While significant steps have been made to inform young adults in Canada about the harms of drinking and driving, students in Ontario were more likely to report driving after using cannabis than driving after drinking.

The following report from the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse provides further information related to [cannabis, youth and driving](#).

In addition, the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition also developed an evidence review on [Cannabis Use and Driving](#), including detection of impaired driving, risk mitigation and public health education.

Webinars

1. Perinatal Cannabis Use - Implications For Pregnancy, Lactation And Parenting

This webinar will provide an evidence-based review of the prevalence and factors associated with [cannabis use during pregnancy and lactation](#). Short- and long-term effects of perinatal cannabis use will also be reviewed, as well as best practices in intervention with pregnant women will be discussed.

2. The Medical Use of Cannabis for Individuals with HIV/AIDS

The Canadian AIDS Society has produced a three-episode webinar series on [The Medical Use of Cannabis](#) with Lynne Belle-Isle, National Programs Consultant.

3. Discussion on Cannabis Legal Framework and Campaign Development Webinar

[This webinar](#) was aimed at those interested in developing health communications targeting Ontario's youth to promote awareness about the new legal framework and prevent use/misuse of cannabis during this critical time of brain development.

The next newsletter will contain further information about cannabis and lessons learned from other jurisdictions. Stay tuned!