



# Cannabis Legalization: Cannabis for Medical Purposes

## Findings

- Cannabis for medical purposes has been legal in Canada since 1999. When cannabis for nonmedical purposes was legalized in 2018, the *Access to Cannabis for Medical Purposes Regulation* became part of the new *Cannabis Act* and its regulations.
- The current model requires people to receive authorization from a healthcare provider and register with Health Canada to access cannabis for medical purposes. People with these authorizations have safeguards and considerations that cannabis for recreational purposes does not have, such as amount they can possess.
- Physicians are not obligated to authorize cannabis for medical purposes (see [Cannabis for Medical Purposes](#) by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta).
- The Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey found more than 30 per cent of respondents who used cannabis reported using it for medical purposes (Statistics Canada, 2021). This survey did not ask how people got their cannabis for medical purposes, so it may include more than those with official authorization.
- About 75 per cent of those who reported using cannabis for medical purposes do not have a medical document from a healthcare professional (Health Canada, 2021).
- There is growing interest in cannabis use for medical or health purposes (Health Canada, 2020). This has happened as cannabis sellers increasingly market products, particularly cannabidiol (CBD), as having potential health benefits of cannabis (Zenone et al., 2021).
- Despite the increase in demand and marketing, evidence does not yet suggest that cannabis and cannabinoid products are effective for treating many of the health conditions for which claims are being made (College of Family Physicians of Canada, 2021; Health Canada, 2018; Renard et al., in press).
- The 2022 Canadian Cannabis Survey found that 53 per cent of those who used cannabis for medical purposes reported that cannabis use decreased their use of other medications (Health Canada, 2022).
- However, there may be an increased risk of developing problematic cannabis use or cannabis use disorder (Lo et al., 2022; Turna et al., 2020).



## Policy Considerations

Despite cannabis for medical purposes being legalized since 1999, there is still not enough evidence available to fully understand its efficacy and impacts. More time is needed to build concrete evidence. In the interim, CCSA suggests the following:

- Conducting a thorough review of the current medical access program; and
- If the current model is revoked, the following program elements should remain to protect the health and safety of people in Canada who use cannabis for medical purposes:
  - Access to information and guidance from healthcare providers about the use of cannabis for medical purposes, including follow-up or monitoring;
  - Access to the quantities of cannabis that are needed by a person using it for medical purposes or their caregiver as the quantity may exceed the recreational limit for possession and home cultivation; and
  - Access in hospitals and other institutions for people authorized to use cannabis for medical purposes, including making accommodations for people who smoke or vape.
- Improving access to healthcare professionals who can provide services to people who use or would like to use cannabis for medical purposes.

## CCSA Resources

[A Public Health Perspective on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation in Canada](#)

[Consultation on the Legislative Review of the Tobacco and Vaping Products Act](#)

[Cannabis Legalization: 2021-2022 Observations](#)

[Clearing the Smoke on Cannabis: Medical Use of Cannabis and Cannabinoids – An Update](#)

## References

College of Family Physicians of Canada. (2021). Guidance in authorizing cannabis products within primary care. Mississauga, Ont.: Author. <https://www.cfpc.ca/CFPC/media/PDF/CFPC-Guidance-in-Cannabis-Within-Primary-Care.pdf>

Health Canada. (2018). Information for health care professionals: Cannabis (marihuana, marijuana) and the cannabinoids: Dried or fresh plant and oil administration by ingestion or other means: Psychoactive agent. Ottawa, Ont.: Author. <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/documents/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/information-medical-practitioners/information-health-care-professionals-cannabis-cannabinoids-eng.pdf>

Health Canada. (2020). Summary report: Consultation on potential market for health products containing cannabis that would not require practitioner oversight. Ottawa, Ont.: Author. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/drugs-health-products/summary-report-consultation-potential-market-health-products-cannabis.html#a1.2>

Health Canada (2021). Canadian Cannabis Survey 2021: Summary. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/research-data/canadian-cannabis-survey-2021-summary.html>



Health Canada (2022). Canadian Cannabis Survey 2022: Summary.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/research-data/canadian-cannabis-survey-2022-summary.html>

Lo, L. A., MacCallum, C. A., Yau, J. C., Panenka, W. J., & Barr, A. M. (2022). Factors associated with problematic cannabis use in a sample of medical cannabis dispensary users. *Psychiatry Clinical Psychopharmacology*, 2(3), 262–267. <https://doi.org/10.5152/pcp.2022.22358>

Renard, J., Sanger, N., & Gabrys, R. (in press). Clearing the smoke on cannabis: Medical use of cannabis and cannabinoids – An update. Ottawa, Ont.: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.

Statistics Canada (2021). Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CADS): Summary of results for 2019. Ottawa, Ont.: Health Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canadian-alcohol-drugs-survey/2019-summary.html>

Turna, J., Balodis, I., Munn, C., Van Ameringen, M., Busse, J., & MacKillop, J. (2020). Overlapping patterns of recreational and medical cannabis use in a large community sample of cannabis users. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 102, Article, 152188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.comppsy.2020.152188>

Zenone, M. A., Snyder, J., & Crooks, V. (2021). Selling cannabidiol products in Canada: A framing analysis of advertising claims by online retailers. *BMC Public Health*, 21, Article 1285. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11282-x>

