

APNS Position Paper on the Sale and Recreational Use of Cannabis in Nova Scotia

The Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia has concerns and suggestions about the upcoming legalized sale and use of cannabis in Nova Scotia.

We recognize that Nova Scotia must proceed within the context of the change in federal laws coming into effect in July 2018. We also believe that Nova Scotia should follow the stated intent of the federal legislation. The stated purpose of the federal legislation is not to promote recreational use of cannabis, but rather to displace the current illegal system with a regulated system that will be better able to prevent use by youth and limit irresponsible use in general.

There are some indications that cannabis or some of its constituents has potential benefits for people with certain medical problems. There is also evidence that cannabis can have harmful effects on developing human brains, which are in development up to about the age of 25. This includes effects on learning ability. Cannabis may precipitate psychosis in predisposed individuals. People can become intoxicated on cannabis to the point that it is unsafe for them to drive. Some cannabis users develop a habit of frequent use which they have difficulty ceasing.

Therefore we recommend that the province of Nova Scotia see the legalization of cannabis not as a new revenue stream, nor as a new industry to be promoted, but rather take an evidence-based approach based on a public health model rather than a commercial model.

1. The provincial government clearly state in policy and legislation that it does not promote, nor endorse the safety of, the recreational use of cannabis.
2. Cannabis be sold with warning labels, similar to those used with tobacco.
3. Promotional advertisement of cannabis be prohibited, as it is with tobacco.
4. All government profit or tax revenue from cannabis sales be earmarked for public education programs about its risks, and for treatment programs for people who develop problematic habits of excessive use. This is an essential point, to ensure that no future government or agency will be tempted to promote sales in order to raise money for other purposes.
5. Edible cannabis products not be permitted to be in “playful” or “candy-like” forms that will appeal to children and increase risks of accidental poisonings of children.
6. Pricing of cannabis products be higher for higher THC content, to discourage the use of products with higher and higher THC content.
7. Clearer criteria for defining intoxication while driving be developed. This will require further scientific research.
8. Cannabis smoking be included in smoke-free public places legislation.
9. The age for purchase and use of recreational cannabis be set at an age which balances the intent to displace the illegal drug network with consideration of the harmful effects on brains developing up to age 25.

REFERENCES

Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH - Ontario)

http://www.camh.ca/en/hospital/about_camh/influencing_public_policy/Documents/CAMHCannabisPolicyFramework.pdf

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Addiction (CCSA)

<http://www.ccdus.ca/Resource%20Library/CCSA-Cannabis-Regulation-Lessons-Learned-Report-2015-en.pdf>

Canadian Medical Association (CMA)

<https://www.cma.ca/Assets/assets-library/document/en/advocacy/submissions/2016-aug-29-cma-submission-legalization-and-regulation-of-marijuana-e.pdf>

Canadian Psychiatric Association

<http://www.cpa-apc.org/wp-content/uploads/Cannabis-Academy-Position-Statement-ENG-FINAL-no-footers-web.pdf>