

Cannabis for Medical and Non-Medical Purposes: NAPRA Position Statement on the Role of Pharmacy Practitioners

July 2017

On April 13, 2017, the Government of Canada proposed the Cannabis Act, which would create a strict legal framework for controlling the production, distribution, sale, and possession of cannabis across Canada. The proposed legislation focuses primarily on cannabis for non-medical purposes; the current program for accessing cannabis for medical purposes would continue under the new Act.

NAPRA's position is that pharmacy practitioners must not be involved in the distribution of cannabis for non-medical purposes. Distribution sites for non-medical cannabis must not be permitted to use terms such as "dispensary" or pharmacy-related symbols such as a green cross, which may lead the public to believe that the distribution site is a pharmacy or that it has professional oversight from pharmacy practitioners.

Suppliers of cannabis for any purpose must follow the federal Good Production Practices required by the Access to Cannabis for Medical Purposes Regulations (ACMPR), or equivalent quality standards yet to be developed. Packaging, labelling, and shipping standards must also be equivalent to those set out in the ACMPR in order to ensure secure supply chains, appropriate product labelling, and child-resistant packaging.

NAPRA also urges decision-makers to restrict advertising and marketing of cannabis, so as not to promote consumption.

For many years, pharmacists have been at the forefront of smoking cessation, helping patients to quit using tobacco. Cannabis smoke contains many of the same carcinogenic chemicals found in tobacco smoke. NAPRA's position is that smoked cannabis products should be subject to the same provincial or territorial legislation as smoked tobacco products.

On November 30, 2016, the final report of the Task Force on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation was published. In addition to recommending that access to cannabis for medical purposes continue to be made available through the ACMPR, the report discussed the future possibility of pharmacy distribution of cannabis for medical purposes. We are aware that some pharmacy groups are advocating for this. As pharmacy regulators, we insist that external pressures must not result in the bypassing of critical checks and balances that preserve the integrity of our health care system, and ultimately, the health of Canadians. NAPRA's members continue to discuss the regulatory safeguards necessary for pharmacy professionals to dispense cannabis for medical purposes. In the interim, pharmacists will continue to be involved in providing patients with information and guidance.

NAPRA's members urge the federal government to consult with NAPRA, early in the process, if there is consideration of pharmacy distribution in the future.