

# Medical Cannabis – Implications for Pharmacists

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CANADIAN PHARMACISTS ASSOCIATION

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CANADIAN PHARMACISTS ASSOCIATION

# Canadian Pharmacists Association

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- National voice of Canada's 42,000 pharmacists
- Our mission is to advance the health and well-being of Canadians through excellence in pharmacist care.



# Objectives

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- To provide an overview of the role of the pharmacist and implications as health care professionals with patients using medical cannabis.
- To review and provide background behind CPhA's recommendations with respect to medical cannabis and the role of pharmacists.
- To identify further areas of opportunity with respect to cannabis and the role of pharmacists and the pharmacy profession.

# Pharmacists

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- Pharmacists act as **medication stewards** on behalf of Canadians
- Most **accessible** health care professionals
- 10,000 pharmacies in urban, rural and remote settings
- Regular and frequent **touchpoints** with patients in their communities



# Pharmacists

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- More than 235,000 registered patients with licensed producers.\*
- Surveys of patients using medical cannabis indicated that 70% or more believe that its use results in moderate or better improvement in symptoms.\*\*
- Pharmacists approached by patients and prescribers about use of cannabis for variety of indications
- Pharmacists manage controlled substances every day
- No current opportunity to include consultation and **oversight** from medication experts at time of dispensing
- Patients need support from HCPs across circle of care to ensure **patient safety**



\* Health Canada. Market Data. Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/medical-use-marijuana/licensed-producers/market-data.html>. Updated on January 04, 2018. Accessed on March 7, 2018.

\*\*Allan M, Finley C, Ton J, et al. Systematic review of systematic reviews for medical cannabinoids. *Can Fam Physician*. 2018;64(2):e87-94. <http://www.cfp.ca/content/64/2/e78>. Published February 2018.



# CPhA Recommendations

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- Informed by:
  - Growing concern among profession about lack of clinical oversight in distribution of medical cannabis
  - Consultations and input from pharmacists
  - Taskforce Recommendations
  - Independent report\*
  - Public opinion polling



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\* KPMG - (Improving Medical Marijuana Management in Canada (March 2016))

# CPhA Recommendations – Medical Stream

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1. Ensure **distinction** between recreational and medical cannabis
2. Support and **include pharmacists** in management and distribution of medical cannabis
3. Enhance and support **increased research** into medical cannabis
4. **Restrict terms such as “dispensary”** or pharmacy-related symbols such as green cross for recreational distribution
5. **Establish pricing** for recreational marijuana that would not encourage patient diversion from medical cannabis stream
6. Regulate recreational cannabis through lens of **health promotion**



# Two Distinct Streams

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- Unique needs of medical patients
- Harm reduction
- Patients should not be expected to self medicate without support from HCPs
- Protecting supply chain to meet patients needs
- Could lead to more systemic benefits – more robust evidence base
- Other jurisdictions treat medical stream as unique





# Support and Include Pharmacists In Management and Distribution of Medical cannabis

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- Pharmacists can leverage expertise re: benefits and harms alone and in context of entire medication history - participate in **shared and informed decision making**
- Pharmacists well positioned - should be part of circle of care
- Pharmacists are regulated HCPs – follow code of ethics

# Pharmacists – Dispensing Medical Cannabis

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- Surveys demonstrate pharmacists believe they have a role in dispensing medical cannabis as an essential part of managing a patient's drug therapy
- Education and professional development needs being addressed
- Regulatory approaches to dispensing could be national or provincial
- Health products containing cannabis



# Enhance and Support Increased Research

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- Understanding of efficacy and safety is evolving
  - Limited evidence re: optimal dosing, strains, drug interactions
- Limited evidence re: benefit
- Consistent evidence re: adverse effects
- Research will be facilitated by keeping medical stream separate and through pharmacist dispensing



# Restricting Use of Pharmacy Related Terms and Symbols

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- Terms and symbols promote notion that recreational marijuana has health benefits
- Compounds risk of misunderstanding that distribution site is pharmacy or has professional oversight from pharmacists



# Establish Pricing that Would not Encourage Diversion from Medical Stream

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- Limited coverage with some insurance providers - but most patients paying out of pocket
- Cost and taxes will be important considerations
- Risk of diverting medical cannabis patients away from the medical system for reasons of cost and convenience



# Regulate Recreational Cannabis Distribution Through Lens of Health Promotion

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- Public Education regarding risks associated with use of marijuana
- Establishment of minimum age
- Product packaging containing warnings of risks
- Rigorous product management regulations
- Mandated training for retail staff on differentiation between medical and recreational use and directing medical users to HCPs



# CPhA Evidence Based Resources and Tools

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- FAQ – answers to commonly asked questions by practitioners and patients
- Education – two CE programs
- Evidence Guide - curated summary of best available evidence - living document
- Cannabis monograph – to help HCPs work with patients and make informed, evidence based decisions

# Closing Thoughts

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- Complex evolving therapeutic area with limited understanding and evolving evidence
- Patient safety is paramount and pharmacists should be partners in a patient focused framework
- Protect unique needs and access for medical patients
- Strengthen clinical oversight in medical stream with pharmacists integral in circle of care



Questions?

