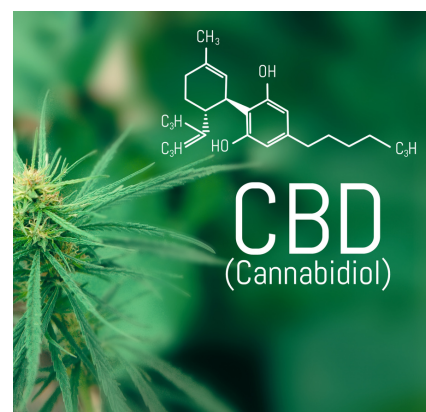


Medical Cannabis

Neighbourhood Pharmacies' Position:

- We ask that the federal government amend the Cannabis Regulations so that pharmacists and pharmacies are authorized to dispense and distribute medical cannabis – just like hospitals and physicians are authorized to do.
- As the healthcare provider closest to where patients live and work, pharmacists are ideally located to support and counsel patients on the safe, effective use of medical cannabis. The counseling and advice provided by pharmacists should be recognized for the clinical value it brings to patients and should be funded appropriately.
- The scheduling of Cannabis Health Products (CHPs) should follow the established national drug scheduling model developed by the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA). Regardless of whether a CHP is classified as a prescription, non-prescription, or natural health product, pharmacists have an important role in providing clinical information to patients at the point of sale.
- Access to recreational cannabis should not be more liberal than access to cannabidiol (CBD)-containing cannabis products that can improve a patient's health. The decision to place CBD on the prescription drug list introduces unintended consequences for patients seeking the benefits of CBD.



Medical Cannabis

Pharmacists play a key role in preventing, monitoring, detecting, and treating medication and substance use disorders arising from the use of natural or pharmaceutical health products, such as cannabinoids. These products carry a risk of developing tolerance, dependence, and potential misuse.[1] Over 90 per cent of patients support pharmacists' ability to provide guidance on cannabis use and risk, along with their ability to dispense cannabis.[2]

Medical cannabis users today, in many cases, are self-medicating, without oversight from healthcare providers. Users report experiencing stigma within the medical system about their cannabis use and difficulty finding a healthcare provider to speak to about their medical cannabis use.[3] Pharmacists invest in evidence-based training and have the skills necessary to educate patients about the appropriate use and potential risks (drug interactions, contraindications, and potentially addictive behaviour) of medical cannabis.[4]

Most medical users (60 per cent) take cannabis alongside other prescribed medications.[5] With the legalization of cannabis, there is an evolving body of literature highlighting drug-drug interactions with cannabis and other prescribed and natural medicines. Close monitoring of the therapeutic response to cannabis is critical to ensuring patient safety, especially for elderly patients and those with kidney and liver diseases.[6] As the healthcare provider closest to where patients live and work, pharmacists are ideally located to support and counsel patients on the safe, effective use of medical cannabis.

Several U.S. states (New York, Utah, Arkansas, Connecticut, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Louisiana) mandate pharmacist involvement in medical cannabis programs.[7] In Connecticut, the first state to legalize cannabis, pharmacists are the only healthcare providers awarded cannabis dispensary licensure for the legal sale of cannabis. In addition, in Australia and many EU countries, pharmacists dispense cannabis for medical use.[8]



Medical Cannabis

The Cannabis Health Products (CHP) category is expected to grow exponentially in the coming years. Thus, it is critical for the sale of CHPs to meet standards of safety and efficacy similar to those of existing natural and pharmaceutical health products.[9] All levels of government should work with pharmacy regulators to align and integrate the regulations governing CHPs – including the display, safety, security, and record-keeping – with those of the established national drug scheduling model.[10] Access to recreational cannabis should not be more liberal than access to CHPs.

Consumers, industry, and association representatives are concerned with CHPs entering the market without oversight from regulated healthcare providers. Consumers prefer pharmacies as the ideal place for the sale of CHPs, compared to licensed retailers. Industry and association representatives prefer having a healthcare professional, such as pharmacists, providing advice to consumers seeking CHPs to support informed decision-making.[11]

Medical cannabis and CHPs are increasingly available to patients and consumers. As a growing number of Canadians explore these products' potential to support overall health and wellness, pharmacy is situated as a central access point and trusted resource. Pharmacists have the necessary training, convenient locations, and familiarity in providing health information to effectively support their patients within the community.



Medical Cannabis

References:

- [1] Ontario Pharmacy Evidence Network. (Jan 2019). Pharmacy in the 21st Century: Enhancing the impact of Pharmacy on people's lives in the context of health care trends, evidence and policies. Page 41. Retrieved from: <https://www.open-pharmacy-research.ca/wp-content/uploads/Future-of-Pharmacy-White-Paper-REVISED-for-posting-Jan-2019.pdf>.
- [2] Medical Cannabis Group. Abacus Data. Medical-Cannabis-Patient-Survey-Topline-Results-FINAL-3.pdf, slide 23.
- [3] Medical Cannabis Group. Abacus Data. Medical-Cannabis-Patient-Survey-Topline-Results-FINAL-3.pdf, slide 13.
- [4] Canadian Pharmacists Association. Medical Cannabis Advocacy Statement. <https://www.pharmacists.ca/advocacy/medical-cannabis/>
- [5] Canadian Pharmacists Association. Submission to consultation on potential market for cannabis health products that would not require practitioner oversight. September 3, 2019. https://www.pharmacists.ca/cpha-ca/assets/File/cpha-on-the-issues/CPhA-Submission_Consultation-on-Potential-Market-for-Cannabis-Health-Products.pdf, p.2.
- [6] Alsherbiny MA, Li CG. Medicinal Cannabis-Potential Drug Interactions. Medicines (Basel). 2018;6(1):3. Published 2018 December 23. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6473892/>
- [7] Schmitz N. and Richert L. Pharmacists and the future of cannabis medicine. Journal of American Pharmacists Association. December 20, 2019. [https://www.japha.org/article/S1544-3191\(19\)30513-8/pdf](https://www.japha.org/article/S1544-3191(19)30513-8/pdf)
- [8] Queensland Government. Guide for pharmacists dispensing medicinal cannabis. <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/public-health/topics/medicinal-cannabis/pharmacists>
- [9] Canopy Growth. Medical Cannabis Pharmacy Retail Market Report Q4 2020. October CHP Market Report - Q4 2020 - Final.pdf, slide 22.
- [10] Canadian Pharmacists Association. Submission to consultation on potential market for cannabis health products that would not require practitioner oversight. September 3, 2019. https://www.pharmacists.ca/cpha-ca/assets/File/cpha-on-the-issues/CPhA-Submission_Consultation-on-Potential-Market-for-Cannabis-Health-Products.pdf, p.4.
- [11] Canopy Growth. Medical Cannabis Pharmacy Retail Market Report Q4 2020. October CHP Market Report - Q4 2020 - Final.pdf, slides 4 and 7.

