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## **Position on Provincial Legalization and Regulation of Cannabis**

In a study of 29 countries, 28% of Canadian adolescents reported cannabis use, placing Canada on the top of the surveyed list (UNICEF, 2013). Further, 33.3% of young adults (18-24 years old) and 15% of middle-aged adults (25-44 years old) used cannabis in the past year (Statistics Canada, 2013). Frequent and long-term cannabis smoking is associated with cancer and bronchitis (Tetrault et al., 2007). About 9% of all cannabis users develop cannabis use disorder (Lopez-Quintero et al., 2011).

The Federal government introduced Bill C-45 (the Cannabis Act) in April of 2017. If passed, the Cannabis Act will legalize cannabis use to protect public health, and restrict the black market. The legislation lists strict manufacturing requirements and a set of industry rules aimed at protecting Canadians against cannabis harms. The Federal government allows provinces to license and oversee cannabis sales and distribution. Provincial legislation is essential to further protect the health of Nova Scotians.

Smoke-Free Nova Scotia is a provincial coalition of health organizations committed to reducing the use of smoked/inhaled tobacco and related products in Nova Scotia. As such our position regarding the legalization and regulation of cannabis is limited to those aspects related to cannabis smoking and inhalation. This includes smoking cannabis or inhaling heated cannabis products using devices including, but not limited to, e-cigarettes, vapes, bongos and water pipes/hookah.

Smoke-Free Nova Scotia recommends the following:

1. Increasing the minimum age to possess, share, purchase, grow and make cannabis from 19 to 21.  
Rationale: The highest percentage of cannabis use takes place during young adulthood (Statistics, 2013). A minimum age of 19 concerns Smoke-Free Nova Scotia due to social sourcing. The evidence states that minors sourcing cannabis and tobacco are likely to rely on individuals closer to their age as compared to those who are somewhat older thus increasing access and use by youth. In addition, the general public supports a minimum age of 21 for cannabis and tobacco. Smoke-Free Nova Scotia commissioned a survey with Nova Scotians in March 2017: 63% supported increasing the minimum age for cannabis from 19 to 21 and 69% supported the same age increase for tobacco. Further, the Federal Tobacco Endgame Summit in 2016, attended by 85 experts in the field, and the recent consultation at the federal level on the renewal of the Federal Tobacco Control Strategy yielded strong support for a minimum age of 21 for tobacco.

2. Prohibiting smoking or inhaling cannabis products in public places where tobacco smoking and e-cigarette and waterpipe/hookah use are prohibited under Nova Scotia's Smoke-Free Places Act.  
Rationale: Cannabis smoke contains many of the toxic particulates and gases in cigarette smoke (Tashkin, 2005). Placing restrictions on smoking cannabis in public places is important to protect the public from exposure to cannabis smoke.

3. Prohibiting exemptions to public cannabis smoking, including member-based cannabis cafes and clubs.  
Rationale: To minimize harm, it is important to prohibit establishment exemptions. Staff in these facilities could also be exposed to cannabis smoke. Further, these facilities normalize cannabis use in society.



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4. Establishing a standalone crown corporation model.

Rationale: To prevent the commercialization of cannabis and effectively regulate its sales. Co-locating cannabis and alcohol within NSLC stores is very problematic as this normalizes cannabis use, given the social acceptability of alcohol. Given the high rate of alcohol use by the adult population compared to the lower usage rate of cannabis, there is a significant risk of cannabis and cannabis advertising being introduced to a large number of Nova Scotians who might not otherwise use cannabis.

5. Strengthen the Smoke-Free Act.

Rationale: Many current cigarette smokers also smoke cannabis (Hindocha et al. 2015). and the toxins in second-hand smoke from cannabis and cigarettes are largely similar. For this reason, more restrictions on public smoking of both cannabis and tobacco are needed. For instance, bans on smoking in provincial parks, hospital grounds, universities, and beaches will reduce exposure to second-hand smoke. Further, increasing the minimum distance from a building entrance for smoking will further restrict exposure to second-hand smoke.

Other tobacco control policies that have been shown to successfully prevent and reduce use and support effective treatment should be put in place to regulate cannabis. This could include controlling location and hours of sale. It could also include targeted education and health promotion that sensitize the public are needed – particularly for vulnerable groups – to the harms and risks of cannabis use, as well as access to effective treatment options for those who want to stop using cannabis. Further, given the precedent set by tobacco, restrictions to advertisement and marketing are necessary; this includes point of sale marketing bans and plain packaging such that the color, font, shape and size of the products is standardized and their brand imagery removed.

To recap, Smoke-Free Nova Scotia's position is confined to cannabis smoking and inhalation. The Coalition suggests the application of tobacco control policies to strengthen federal legislation through increasing minimum age requirements, imposing public use bans and other regulations consistent with those within Nova Scotia's Smoke-Free Places and Tobacco Access Acts. The recommendations are intended to protect Nova Scotians against the harms of cannabis inhalation and smoking.

For further information:

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