



Mental Health  
Commission  
of Canada

Commission de  
la santé mentale  
du Canada

# Closing the Research Gap on Cannabis and Mental Health

Canada is just the second country in the world to legalize cannabis for non-medical use. This decision offers researchers an unprecedented opportunity to study the impacts of cannabis use in a legalized environment—including its effects on mental health. To seize that opportunity, the federal government has allocated \$10 million to the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) over the next five years to investigate the risks and benefits of cannabis as well as the varying needs of diverse subpopulations of people living in Canada.

## Key areas for additional research

Our goal over the next five years—and beyond—is to fill knowledge gaps related to cannabis and its impact on mental health. Key questions include:

- What factors predict an increased risk of developing mental health problems and illnesses (including psychosis) among individuals who use cannabis?
- Has legalizing non-medical cannabis affected the prevalence of mental illness?
- Has legalizing non-medical cannabis affected the prevalence of cannabis use disorder? Has it affected the prevalence of other substance use disorders?
- Can cannabis and cannabinoids be used to treat the symptoms of certain mental health problems and illnesses, such as anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder?

Existing research shows that risks associated with cannabis use are affected by the age of initiation, frequency, and method of use and by the ratio and concentration of the cannabinoids (e.g., tetrahydrocannabinol [THC] versus cannabidiol [CBD]) most frequently used.

### Cannabis use

### IN CANADA



Canada has **one of the world's highest cannabis consumption rates**

According to the 2017 Canadian Tobacco Alcohol and Drugs Survey of Canadians 15 years and older:



**15% have used cannabis** in the last year.



**47% have tried cannabis** at least once in their lifetime.

**37%** of those who used cannabis in the last year reported doing so for **medical reasons**.



Cannabis use is most prevalent **among youth aged 20–24 (33%)** and is higher **among males (19%)** than **females (11%)**.

# A comprehensive approach

Cannabis use and its related mental health issues don't exist in isolation. They are shaped by countless personal and societal factors and give rise to important questions about health equity, human rights, social justice, and more. In keeping with the federal government's public health approach to legalizing and regulating cannabis, the MHCC is advocating for a broad, holistic view of how to mitigate the harms associated with cannabis use—from understanding the relevant social determinants of health to applying evidence-informed policy and practice.

## A vital research agenda

Supporting a public health approach requires more research into all aspects of cannabis use and its effects. Greater understanding of effective treatment options for cannabis dependence is especially important—particularly for people living with mental health problems and illnesses. Over the next five years, we'll be pursuing that research under two main objectives:

### 1 Inform current and future research

We will use our funding to

- review best evidence and existing research related to mental health and cannabis use
- form an advisory committee to provide strategic advice, feedback, and expertise to MHCC on the execution of the project including research investments
- convene community, researcher and health-care groups to inform research.

### 2 Advance research, build the evidence base, and mobilize knowledge

We will use our funding to

- support one- and two-year Catalyst Grants focused on cannabis use and mental health outcomes
- invest in multi-year, academic, team-based research projects aligned with the integrated cannabis research strategy from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research
- invest in community-based research that is generated by the interests of priority populations and involves people with lived experience of cannabis use and/or mental health problems and illnesses
- coordinate research and knowledge mobilization with the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.

**Help us shed light on the facts**

**We're looking for partners to help us fill in the knowledge gaps about cannabis and its effects on mental health.**

If you'd like to get involved, contact us at [cannabis@mentalhealthcommission.ca](mailto:cannabis@mentalhealthcommission.ca).

To learn more about our cannabis research and other mental health initiatives, visit us:



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