

**Report to  
Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Board of Health  
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa  
17 October 2016 / 17 octobre 2016**

**Submitted on October 7, 2016  
Soumis le 7 octobre 2016**

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**Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE      File Number: ACS2016-OPH-HPDP-0006**

**SUBJECT: OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH SUBMISSION TO FEDERAL TASK FORCE  
- TOWARD THE LEGALIZATION, REGULATION AND RESTRICTION  
OF ACCESS TO MARIJUANA**

**OBJET: SOUMISSION DE SANTÉ PUBLIQUE OTTAWA AU GROUPE DE  
TRAVAIL FÉDÉRAL – VERS LA LÉGALISATION, LA  
RÉGLEMENTATION ET LA RESTRICTION DE L'ACCÈS À LA  
MARIJUANA**

**REPORT RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit receive this report for information.**

## RECOMMANDATION DU RAPPORT

**Que le Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la ville d'Ottawa prenne connaissance du présent rapport à titre d'information.**

## BACKGROUND

In the 2015 Speech from the Throne, the Government of Canada committed to legalizing, regulating, and restricting access to marijuana. Towards this goal, in June 2016, the federal government announced the [Task Force on Marijuana Legalization and Regulation](#), and committed to unveiling legislation in spring 2017. The task force released a [discussion paper](#), which outlined considerations, discussed possible options and posed specific questions based on the following five (5) themes: Minimizing Harms of Use; Establishing a Safe and Responsible Production System; Designing an Appropriate Distribution System; Enforcing Public Safety and Protection; and Accessing Marijuana for Medical Purposes. The deadline for providing input was August 29, 2016.

In preparing its submission to the Task Force on Marijuana Legalization and Regulation, Ottawa Public Health (OPH) was mindful of the positions taken by other health organizations. OPH also joined the Ontario Provincial Marijuana Collaborative, a group of substance misuse professionals from several public health units promoting a comprehensive public health approach to cannabis.

As this is an emerging field with limited research, OPH reviewed best practices and literature pertaining to alcohol and tobacco control, with a focus on reducing the potential harms for the population as a whole, as well as supporting the application of a health focused evidence-informed public health approach to restricting and regulating access to cannabis. OPH's submission sought to build on past work in the area of cannabis use, specifically OPH partnering with the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) to promote [The Effects of Cannabis Use during Adolescence](#) report and OPH's recent [report on enhancing harm reduction services](#).

## DISCUSSION

As mentioned above, the federal government's discussion paper outlined considerations, discussed options and posed specific questions based on five (5) themes. The OPH submission focused on responding to those specific questions, as well as recommending that the federal government consider a public health approach to the legalization, regulation and restriction of access to cannabis. As such, OPH

recommended a public health approach that would include the following four guiding principles:

- Investments in health assessment, surveillance and research;
- Investments for health promotion/prevention activities;
- Health protection; and
- Sufficient supports for evidence-informed early identification and treatment.

The federal discussion paper largely focused on reducing harms to youth through protection measures. However, OPH recommended that other mechanisms be put into place to further reduce harms to ensure that Canadians are making informed decisions and to ensure that decision makers have research and valid information to inform policy. The public health approach, as outlined above, along with the recommendations outlined below, would help to guide the efforts towards these new regulations.

To support a regulatory framework, the [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#) (CAMH) offers ten basic principles to guide regulation of legal cannabis use. OPH recommended that these principles be considered a starting point (i.e. minimum requirements for a public health focused regulatory framework). Many of these principles were included in the federal discussion paper; however the options proposed for monitoring and evidence informed treatment could be strengthened.

Further, OPH's submission noted that there is also a need for surveillance, research, knowledge exchange, and evaluation. Currently, there is a lack of research in many areas of cannabis regulation and its use. The illegal status of marijuana has restricted research; therefore there are still many gaps in knowledge, such as the full range of health and social risks and therapeutic uses. More research is needed regarding specific health risks. This research could be used in the development of evidence-based health warnings for cannabis packaging labels. Many recommendations for a regulatory framework have been made based on evidence borrowed from alcohol and tobacco research, and these should be substantiated by ongoing research specific to cannabis. The evaluation of the regulations going forward will be essential to inform policy makers in the years to come to ensure the effectiveness of the systems put in place. To support these activities, OPH recommended that a portion of government revenues from cannabis should be formally dedicated to these activities.

Finally, OPH recommended that the new regulatory system should include investments in education and prevention. Both general and targeted initiatives (e.g. to raise

awareness of the risks to specific groups, such as adolescents or people with a personal or family history of mental illness) are needed.

In summary, OPH recommended that the federal government:

- Implement all of the proposed protection policies outlined in the federal discussion paper;
- Conduct ongoing surveillance and monitoring on the patterns and trends associated with use, including the collection of baseline data prior to legalization;
- Invest in research to address gaps in knowledge and establish evidence to further inform regulations and health prevention messaging;
- Invest in a collaborative public health approach that prioritizes a continuum of evidence-informed prevention and treatment services to prevent and respond to problematic use;
- Provide funding for public education related to the different effects and risks associated with use of different formats of cannabis; and
- Ensure that a reliable system is put in place for product monitoring and testing.

Document 2 of this report outlines OPH's specific recommendations pertaining to the five (5) themes outlined in the task force's discussion paper. In general, OPH professional staff felt that many of the measures outlined in the discussion paper were appropriate; however, there were areas for improvement. Of important note, OPH did not provide recommendations and/or comments in areas that were out of scope for public health and/or in areas where there was limited public health literature.

OPH's submission to the federal government marks an initial step in examining and analysing the public health impacts and implications of regulating cannabis in Canada. Over the next year, OPH will continue to work with other health units, other city departments, and various community agencies to further define the public health implications and possible mitigation strategies to cannabis regulations.

## **RURAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no rural implications to this information report.

**CONSULTATION**

The purpose of this report is administrative in nature and therefore no public consultation is required.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal impediments to receiving the information in this report.

**RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no risk management implications associated with this information report.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

**ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS**

There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

**TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

There are no term of council priorities associated with this report.

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

Document 1 – Toward the Legalization, Regulation and Restriction of Access to Marijuana: Submission to Federal Task Force (held on file with the Board Secretary)

Document 2 - OPH specific recommendations pertaining to the five (5) themes outlined in the task force discussion paper

**DISPOSITION**

This report is presented to the Board for information purposes.