

APNL Position Paper on the Sale and Recreational Use of Cannabis in Newfoundland and Labrador

The Association of Psychologist Newfoundland and Labrador has concerns and suggestions about the upcoming legalized sale and use of cannabis in Newfoundland and Labrador

We recognize that Newfoundland and Labrador must proceed within the context of the change in federal laws coming into effect in July 2018. We also believe that Newfoundland and Labrador should follow the stated intent of the federal legislation. The stated purpose of the federal legislation is not to promote recreational use of cannabis, but rather to displace the current illegal system with a regulated system that will be better able to prevent use and limit irresponsible use in general.

There are some indications that cannabis or some of its constituents has potential benefits for people with certain medical problems. There is also evidence that cannabis can have harmful effects on developing human brains, which are in development up to about the age of 25. Research has demonstrated that regular cannabis use in youth and young adults can impact cognitive, attention, memory, processing speed, visuospatial reasoning and overall intelligence. Unfortunately, many of these impairments remain permanent, despite abstinence following regular use. Education towards youth as well as their parents will be critical in allowing citizens to make informed choices and knowing the potential risks.

There are particular groups of individuals who are particularly vulnerable to developing a primary psychotic illness with early and regular use of cannabis. Individuals with a family history of psychosis, schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder and panic disorder are known to be particularly vulnerable. Cannabis use may also increase the risk of depression. High potency cannabis has been demonstrated to worsen a number of psychological conditions, particularly individuals with panic and anxiety disorders. Again, public education will be essential so that those at risk can make informed choices.

Cannabis legislation in Newfoundland and Labrador may enhance the safety and quality control of the substance while decreasing negative illegal market consequences. However, there are risks, particularly for youth, special populations, and when there is insufficient public education. Psychologists can play a key role in assisting with this transition and ensuring the psychological health and wellness of the province.

References:

Canadian Psychiatric Association - <https://www.cpa-apc.org/wp-content/uploads/Cannabis-Academy-Position-Statement-ENG-FINAL-no-footers-web.pdf>

Canadian Psychological Association - https://cpa.ca/docs/File/Position/Position_Paper_Recommendations_for_the_Legalization_of_Cannabis_in_Canada-September_2017.pdf