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# Cannabis Legalization: Context, Issues and Options

**Halifax Municipal Cannabis Symposium**

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# About CCSA

- Vision: A healthier Canadian society where evidence transforms approaches to substance use
- Mission: To address issues of substance use in Canada by providing national leadership and harnessing the power of evidence to generate coordinated action
- National non-profit organization
- Pan-Canadian and international role



# Overview

- **Legislative Context**
  - Where are we now?
  - Where are we going?
- **Key Considerations**
  - Health impacts
  - Social impacts
- **Regulatory Options**
  - Exploring a public health approach
  - International experiences



# Part 1: Legislative Context





# Current Context

- The *Controlled Drugs and Substance Act* prohibits cannabis production, distribution and possession
- The *Access to Cannabis for Medical Purposes Regulations* regulate the production, distribution and possession of cannabis for authorized medical purposes
- Cannabis production, distribution and possession is prohibited at the international level by the *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs*

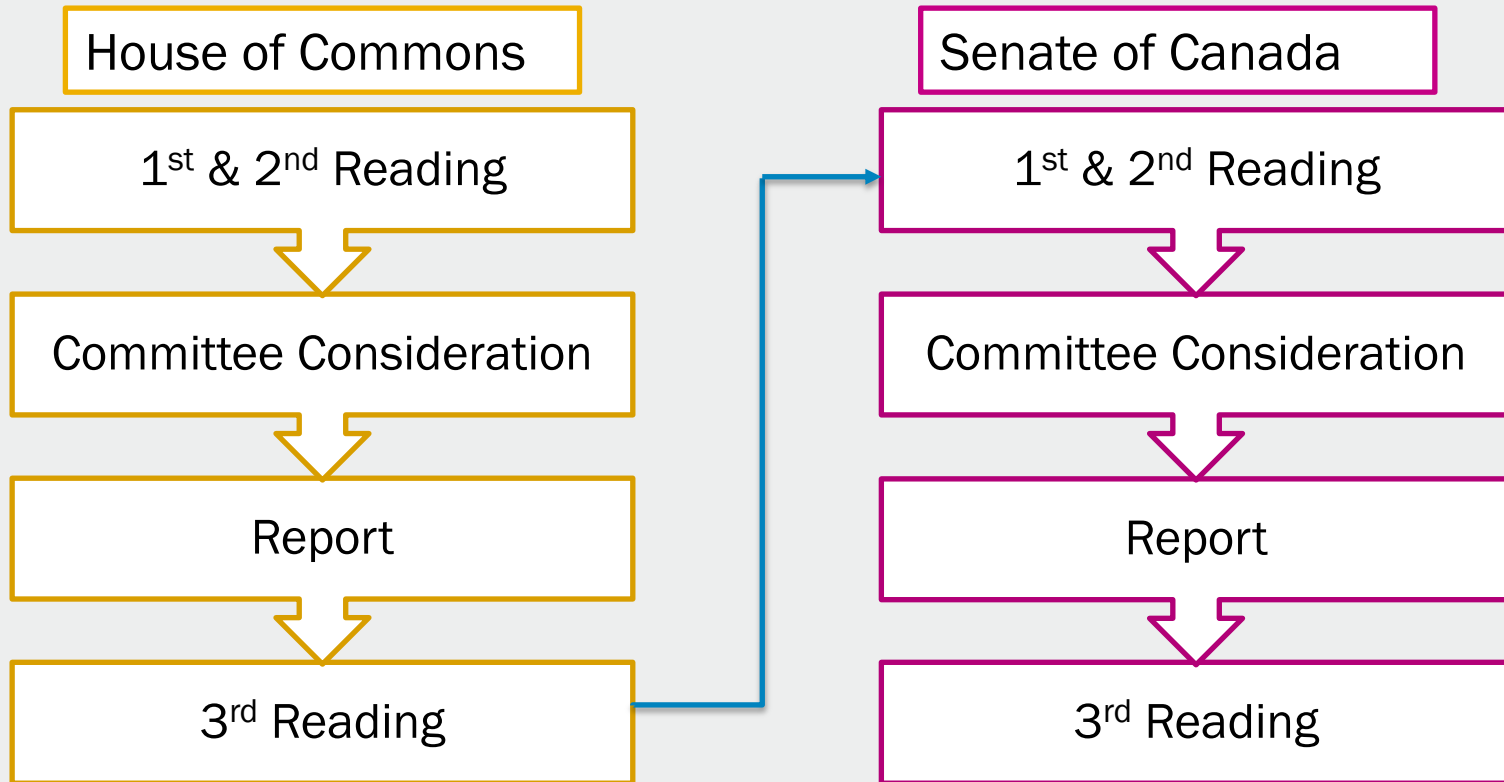


# Task Force

- The Task Force on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation:
  - Chaired by the Hon. Anne McLellan
  - Conducted consultations
  - Accepted submissions
  - Tabled non-binding recommendations in December 2016
- **These recommendations provided the foundation for Bills C-45 and C-46**



# Legislative Process: Next Steps





# Proposed Legislation: Bill C-45

- **Objectives**
  - Prevent young persons from accessing cannabis
  - Protect public health and safety
  - Deter criminal activity
  - Reduce the burden on the criminal justice system





# Bill C-45 (cont'd)

- **Outlines exemptions to criminal prohibition for:**
  - Production
    - Personal production of up to 4 plants 100cm high
  - Distribution
  - Sale
    - Minimum age of 18
  - Possession
    - Up to 30g of dried product or its equivalent



# Bill C-45 (cont'd)

- Identifies criminal penalties
  - Range from fines to 14 years incarceration
- Identifies regulatory and process requirements, including:
  - Promotion and packaging
    - Not accessible or appealing to youth
    - Factual and brand information only



# Bill C-45 (cont'd)

- Regulatory and process requirements (continued):
  - Product formats
    - Dried products and oils
    - NOTE: Regulations for edibles to follow
  - Prohibition of the use of organic solvents to produce extracts
- Identifies non-criminal sanctions for regulatory breaches
  - For example, fines, suspension or removal of licences



# Bill C-46

- Addresses the operation of vehicles while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs
- Moves all per se limits into regulations with tiered sanctions
- Includes provisions for:
  - Random breath testing
  - Roadside oral fluid screening
  - Blood samples by qualified technicians



# Next Steps

- The federal government also announced:
  - Canadian cannabis survey
  - Prevention and education campaigns
- Implementation: Developing provincial, territorial and municipal regulations



# Part 2: Key Considerations





# Health Impacts of Cannabis Use

- **Acute**
  - Cognitive
  - Motor Skills
  - Psychological
  - Injury
- **Chronic**
  - Cognitive
  - Respiratory
  - Psychological
  - Dependence
  - Pregnancy



# Social Impacts of Cannabis Use

- Education
- Employment
- Public safety
  - Impaired driving
- Criminal justice
  - Illegal market
  - Criminal records





# Public Health Objectives

- Minimize harm, maximize benefit
  - Increase:
    - Age of initiation
    - Quality of product consumed
  - Decrease:
    - Rates of use overall
    - Higher-risk use in particular



# What Higher Risk Use Means

- **Vulnerable populations:**
  - Youth, pregnant women
  - Those at risk of psychosis
- **Particular settings or contexts:**
  - Schools and workplace
  - Before or while driving
- **In particular ways:**
  - Frequently
  - In high doses
  - With other psychoactive substances
  - Through combustion
  - Home extraction



# Knowledge Gaps and Challenges

- In order to reduce harms and maximize benefits, we need to fill knowledge gaps such as:
  - Consistent definitions and measures
  - Effects based on gender, cultural, physical and mental health, and age characteristics
  - Interaction of cannabis with other substances
  - Impacts of various plant compositions, product formats and patterns of use
  - Long-term impacts of moderate use



# Knowledge Gaps and Challenges (cont'd)

- National research agenda priorities (cont'd):
  - Validation of existing research
  - Impacts of various regulatory frameworks
  - Impaired driving
- Collaboration and coordination are needed to address these questions



# Part 3: Regulatory Options





# Commercialization





# Regulatory Options

- Non-profit models:
  - Personal production
  - Co-operatives
  - Non-profit agencies



# Regulatory Options (cont'd)

- Government monopoly:
  - Over production
  - Over purchase and distribution
    - Examples: central warehouse, distribution centre
  - Over sales
    - Example: Crown corporation
- Private licensees:
  - Subject to government regulation





# Where to Start?

- Norms of use:
  - What do you want cannabis use to look like in your community in five years?
  - What do we do now to make that happen?
- What knowledge can we draw on for guidance?
  - Experience with regulating alcohol, tobacco and gambling
  - Experience in other countries



# Lessons Learned





# Lessons Learned

- Take the time and invest in administration and infrastructure
- Make proactive investments toward:
  - Reducing harms
    - Prevention and education
    - Treatment services and supports
  - Ensuring an evidence-informed approach
    - Research
    - Surveillance and monitoring





# Lessons Learned (cont'd)

- Allow flexibility to respond to the unexpected
- Work collaboratively
  - Include diverse stakeholders and perspectives
- Look to existing models
  - Tobacco, alcohol, and gambling
  - US states and Uruguay



# Conclusion: Moving Forward

- Promoting an evidence-informed public health approach:
  - Reflecting local context, including resources
  - Building on local foundations (e.g., municipal alcohol policies)
- Working collaboratively
  - Leverage available expertise
  - Share information and lessons learned

# Contact Information

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