

For immediate release:

### **Cannabis legislation should increase mental health funding, educate youth and promote zero tolerance in cars**

(Toronto, Monday, Aug. 14, 2017) – A new report by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Ontario Division offers the provincial government wide-ranging recommendations to reduce the health risks and harms associated with the legalization and regulation of cannabis.

The [report](#), released today, was created for the Ontario government as the province considers the federal plan to legalize cannabis by July 2018. In the report, CMHA Ontario recommends:

- All cannabis-related revenue should be earmarked to fund mental health and addictions services, public awareness campaigns, research and enforcement issues.
- That further research is necessary to have an accurate understanding of the links between cannabis use, mental health and addictions.
- Enhanced access to mental health and addictions treatment, specifically for youth and heavy-cannabis users.
- Zero tolerance for cannabis use by drivers and passengers in motorized vehicles.
- Education for those that distribute cannabis to consumers through a Cannabis Card program, like Ontario's Smart Serve program.
- The minimum age to purchase cannabis should be 19, the same as the drinking age in Ontario.
- Strict rules on advertising and marketing cannabis products, like current restrictions on tobacco products.
- Cannabis laws be consistent with existing legislation, such as the *Liquor License Act* and the *Smoke Free Ontario Act*, which govern where Ontarians can drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes.

“The risk is that legalization of cannabis may lead to an increase in use among Ontarians,” said Camille Quenneville, CEO of CMHA Ontario. “When taken together our recommendations can minimize the harms associated with cannabis use and support a public health approach to this issue.”

The [report](#) also focuses on issues related to cannabis and youth/young adults as that is a segment of the population that uses most frequently. For example, about 40 per cent of Ontarians aged 18-29 have used cannabis within the past year.

“More research needs to occur about the impact of cannabis on a young person’s development,” Quenneville said. “We know frequent cannabis use can harm a developing brain but there is no evidence that indicates a specific age when cannabis use is safe for youth or young adults.”

Other recommendations specific to youth/ young adults include:

- Decriminalization of personal possession of cannabis in small amounts.
- Criminal sanctions should be replaced with alternatives such as mandatory education, police referrals to community based mental health and addictions programs, community service, counselling and other supports.
- Education about the health risks of cannabis as early as possible with age-appropriate content, created with the input of youth, and delivered by trained facilitators.

Read CMHA Ontario's full [report](#).

**Fast Facts:**

- Cannabis is the most commonly used illegal drug in Canada.
- More than 40 per cent of Canadians have used cannabis in their lifetime.
- Research suggests that people with mental illnesses are more than seven times more likely to use cannabis weekly compared to individuals without a mental illness.

***About Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario***

*The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) works toward a single mission: to make mental health possible for all. The vision of CMHA Ontario is a society that believes mental health is the key to well-being. CMHA Ontario works closely with 30 local branches in communities across the province to ensure the quality delivery of services to approximately 100,000 individuals each year in the areas of mental health, addictions, dual diagnosis and concurrent disorders. Through policy analysis and implementation, agenda setting, research, evaluation and knowledge exchange, we work to improve the lives of people with mental health and addictions conditions and their families.*

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