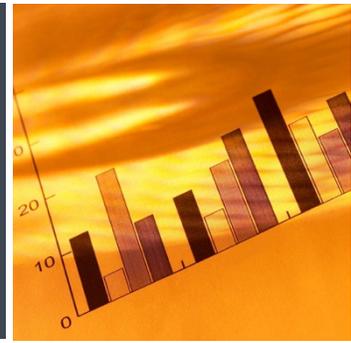


# Research Symposium on Cannabis



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BUILDING A SAFE AND RESILIENT CANADA

## Overview

On September 27, 2017, Public Safety Canada hosted a Research Symposium on Cannabis in Ottawa, Ontario. The event brought together researchers from various federal departments, provincial and territorial governments, universities and non-governmental organizations to discuss the current state of cannabis-related research and to identify gaps and future research priorities. Specifically, the symposium aimed to:

1. Facilitate a meaningful and productive discussion among experts and stakeholders on research results and trends;
2. Contribute to translating research findings into policy and practice; and,
3. Enable the identification and discussion of research gaps.

The symposium gathered 72 participants from a variety of disciplines. The participants presented their research in four thematic areas:

1. General research on cannabis;
2. Cannabis and driving;
3. Cannabis pricing and markets; and
4. Enforcing cannabis laws and crime.

## Research Priorities

A number of priorities emerged as requiring further research attention.

**Effects of cannabis on the human body.** Further research is required on the long-term physical impacts of cannabis use, the effects of cannabis on mental health and the effects of cannabis on brain development of the fetus and during infancy.

**Specific groups.** Much of the existing research has not broken down differences by demographic characteristics. As such, research is required with respect to the cannabis-related attitudes, perceptions and experiences of groups such as youth, pregnant women, Indigenous Peoples, members of visible minorities, persons of low socioeconomic status, and individuals who use cannabis for both medical and recreational purposes. Further, with respect to parents and caregivers, there is a need to determine if patterns of consumption impact childcare in the home.

**Gender differences.** Future research should address gender differences in the amount of THC required to become impaired and in patterns of cannabis use between males and females. For instance, it is not yet well understood how the same dose of cannabis affects the level of impairment in men and women.

**Law enforcement and policing priorities.** The main priority in this area was with respect to operational procedures for oral fluid screening devices. Non-research priorities were also identified in this area, such as the updating and standardization of cannabis-related terminology in a legal context in order to remove social stigma and criminality.

**Product-related priorities.** As Canadian industries prepare to provide the supply of cannabis for the legal market, priorities include developing standards in key areas such as indoor and outdoor horticulture, processing and handling, security and transportation, personnel training and credentialing. Alternative destruction techniques for stems and leaves were also identified as a priority, as were pest and fungi management.

**Laboratory testing.** Finally, as Canada moves into the legalization of recreational use of cannabis, the capacity of laboratories to perform the required testing of products is also a priority. This involves training staff and developing product testing standards for cannabis in all forms to facilitate consistent testing and research comparability.

### Research Gaps

Lack of data, inconsistent and non-comparable data, and access to data were common themes across the identified research gaps. Given that data collection in this area is still developing, data is lacking when attempting to understand the anticipated licit and illicit demand for cannabis, the export market, and the patterns of use of cannabis. Longitudinal research, such as life-course cannabis use, and research on tolerance are also limited. Although self-reported use data are already being collected through a variety of sources, underreporting and inaccurate reporting are acknowledged problems. Moreover, some data holdings (e.g., cannabis seizure data, which are of relevance to understanding the export market and the role of organized crime) are not readily available to researchers.

**Drug Interactions.** In addition, gaps with respect to understanding the interaction between cannabis and other substance (e.g. alcohol, opioids) were recurrent themes, including with respect to cumulative effects and to comparisons between substances' effects, both in general and in areas such as driving.

**Impairment thresholds.** A gap also exists with respect to the determination of the dosage required for impairment. As in the case of alcohol, impairment by cannabis will depend on many factors such as sex, weight, and age. Yet, while some general alcohol dosage guidelines exist (e.g., one standard drink per hour is generally considered non-impaired), this is not the case for cannabis.

### Conclusion

The symposium has contributed to a stronger shared understanding of where to focus future research. The

event and related research support on-going policy and regulatory developments as Canada moves toward and beyond legalization of recreational cannabis use in July 2018.

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For more information on research at the Community Safety and Countering Crime Branch, Public Safety Canada, or to be placed on our distribution list, please contact:

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