

Public-facing advice on Cannabis

Updated Terms of Reference

Preamble

In order to help inform the public in the lead up to the referendum on the legalization of cannabis, the Prime Minister has asked her Chief Science Advisor, Professor Juliet Gerrard, to coordinate a short, authoritative, accessible and unbiased summary of the evidence for the harms and benefits of legalized cannabis. This will include an assessment of the international evidence base for the potential impacts of its legislation. It will not make recommendations.

Aotearoa New Zealand is a world leader in some aspects of cannabis research and has a number of experts in the field connected to the international research community. Professor Gerrard will bring together a team of these leading scientists and researchers in cannabis, its effects, and the impacts of changes in legislation overseas, to review and assemble the information into an accessible format. This information will be peer reviewed by the Chief Science Advisor Forum and international experts ahead of release.

Cannabis for recreational (adult) use has been legalized overseas, *e.g.* in a number of states in the United States of America, as well as in Uruguay and, most recently, Canada. Cannabis use has been decriminalized in a number of other jurisdictions. There is a substantial body of literature on the effects of cannabis, including from the longitudinal studies conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand, and a growing evidence base on the impacts of decriminalization and of legalization. The group will assist in gathering the peer-reviewed literature, providing a balanced summary, and placing it in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Questions to be addressed

The information summary will include the evidence base to address the following specific questions:

- What are the personal and societal harms from recreational cannabis use¹?
- What are the potential non-medical benefits of recreational cannabis use? *e.g.* reduction in costs for the justice system
- What is the evidence base surrounding impacts of decriminalization of recreational cannabis use, and how might the impacts be monitored?
- What is the evidence base surrounding the impacts of legalization of recreational cannabis² use, and how might the impacts be monitored?
- What is the confidence level around the evidence base and where are there important gaps in our knowledge?

¹ Memedovich, K.A., Dowsett, L.E, Spackman, E., Noseworthy, T., and Clement, F. CMAJ Open (2018) 6(3) E339-E346 DOI:10.9778/cmajo.20180023

² Winble, S.B., Wade, K., Filion, K.B., Kimmelman, J. Thombs, B.D. and Eisenberg, M.J. Canadian Journal of Public Health (2019) 110:222–226 doi.org/10.17269/s41997-018-00173-1

Out of scope: The material will not address the medical benefits of cannabis or its derivatives. Nor will the evidence base for availability of effective cannabis testing, *e.g.* for drivers, be included. Both these important topics have been and will be addressed in different pieces of work.

Process

- Terms of Reference clarified.
- Panel approached and appointed.
- The membership of the group will be made public and provide guidance to the Office of the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor in preparing a summary of the peer-reviewed evidence that answers the questions above and identifies gaps and uncertainties in the evidence.
- Once a draft has been agreed by the group, the material will be circulated to a wider group of experts for peer review.
- After peer review the material will be made available to the public via the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor’s website along with the names of the group and peer reviewers.
- The PMCSA will be available to brief a cross party parliamentary group.

Individual panel members will be free to interact with the media and Ministry Officials as individuals, but the panel itself will operate independently and not report until all the evidence has been reviewed and synthesized.

Timeline

June/July 2019	Terms of reference uploaded onto PMCSA website
August 2019	Membership of panel published
13 December 2019	The final summary of information will be submitted to the PMO
End January 2020	Likely release date

Updated timeline

The PM has asked that we revise the timeline in order that the evidence we present is as relevant as possible to the legislation.

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August 2019	Membership of panel published
May 2019	The final summary of information will be submitted to the PMO
June 2020	Likely release date