

Most Ontario adults support government regulation over cannabis production and sale

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Credit: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Most Ontario adults support government-controlled options for producing and selling cannabis, according to new survey results from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). While public opinion continues to swing toward liberalizing recreational cannabis use control, Ontarians favour keeping cannabis production in the hands of either government agencies or regulated private businesses, and having regulated outlets for the sale of cannabis.

Published online in the *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, the study provides new insights into [public opinion](#) as the federal government considers the details of [cannabis](#) policy reform towards legalization.

"Our findings are a clear and strong signal from Ontarians that they want regulated channels when it comes to the supply of cannabis, rather than a privatized or free-market model," says Dr. Benedikt Fischer, Senior Scientist with CAMH's Institute for Mental Health Policy Research and lead investigator on the study. "Evidence also suggests that a regulated supply model is a key approach to safeguard public health."

Opting for government control over supply

On the production side, while only a minority (21 per cent) of people approved of a government monopoly on producing cannabis, more than half consistently supported either government agencies or regulated private businesses as producers of cannabis.

On the distribution side, nearly two-thirds said sales should be in government-regulated outlets.

The findings are based on a telephone survey of 2,004 Ontarians age 18 years or older conducted between January and December 2014. The study questions were part of the ongoing CAMH Monitor survey, the longest ongoing addiction and [mental health](#) survey of adults in Canada. Respondents were a representative cross-section of Ontario adults.

Growing support for liberalizing cannabis use

The survey also found that fewer than 15 per cent of Ontario adults wanted to maintain current criminal control of recreational cannabis use.

"Support for reform has been increasing steadily, from about 20 per cent in the 1970s, to more than 80 per cent today," says Dr. Fischer.

More than half of respondents (53 per cent) said recreational cannabis use should be legalized. These respondents were almost evenly split between supporting no legal or other consequences, or requiring compulsory education or treatment with no legal repercussions.

Another 28 per cent said cannabis use should be a non-criminal offense with, for example, a fine as the penalty, supporting decriminalization rather than legalization.

As well, nearly half (47 per cent) of respondents reported that they had used cannabis in their lifetime, and 14 per cent had used it in the past 12 months, responding to a separate question in the broader CAMH Monitor survey.

Cannabis use and supply first became subject to criminal control in Canada in 1923, and today, enforcement of cannabis laws costs Canadians an estimated \$1.2 billion a year. According to the most recent law-enforcement data, an estimated 65,000 arrests in Canada each year are related to cannabis, primarily for personal possession, and an estimated 700,000 people have criminal records for a related conviction.

The study investigators note that a challenge in adopting a regulated supply model for recreational cannabis will be that recently revised federal regulations rely primarily on an extensively developed private-industry system for the supply of medical marijuana.

In 2014, CAMH released its [Cannabis Policy Framework](#), which recommends legalization of cannabis use and supply with strict regulation as the most effective approach to promote public health and reduce harms associated with cannabis use, including problems with

[cannabis dependence](#) and mental illness.

More information: Benedikt Fischer et al, Public Opinion towards Cannabis Control in Ontario: Strong but Diversified Support for Reforming Control of Both Use and Supply, *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice* (2016). [DOI: 10.3138/CJCCJ.2015E.43](#)

Provided by Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

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