



Cannabis Legalization



University
of Victoria

Canadian Institute for
Substance Use Research

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR
HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIPS
WITH CANNABIS ON CAMPUS

Quick summary of cannabis regulations

The federal [Cannabis Act](#) defines which forms of cannabis are legal, how it may be sold and how much a person may possess. In BC, the [Cannabis Control and Licensing Act](#) and the [Cannabis Distribution Act](#) also apply. These laws, along with amendments to other legislation, create a legal context in BC in which:

Adults over age 19 may:

- possess and share up to 30 grams of cannabis or equivalent in a public place, and up to 1,000 grams in a private place such as their home
- smoke or vape cannabis in most public spaces in which tobacco smoking is allowed
- grow up to four cannabis plants per household for personal use from seeds or seedlings from authorized suppliers and make legal cannabis-containing products (food/drink) at home
- purchase limited amounts of fresh/dried cannabis, cannabis oil, edibles, extracts, topicals, seeds or plants from retailers authorized by the province

Cannabis is sold in BC through:

- government operated Cannabis Stores and licensed private retailers (on-premise use of cannabis products is not allowed)
- government operated online retail sales

Adults may not:

- give, sell or promote cannabis or cannabis accessories to anyone under 19 years of age
- allow a minor to consume in a place under their control or to purchase cannabis for them
- smoke or vape cannabis in the workplace or use it on or beside school property
- use cannabis in any place where tobacco use is prohibited
- use cannabis in vehicles or operate a vehicle while impaired by cannabis
- take cannabis across international borders
- use a dangerous solvent (e.g., butane) to process cannabis
- operate a vehicle (whether or not it is in motion) with cannabis in it, unless the cannabis is from a federal producer and is still in unopened original packaging or is not readily accessible by the occupants

There are certain exemptions from the above rules for purchase, possession, cultivation and consumption of medical cannabis which is in compliance with federal authorizations under the Cannabis Act.

For more information see [Get Cannabis Clarity](#)

People under age 19 may not:

- consume, possess, produce, supply, sell, purchase or attempt to purchase cannabis/accessories unless authorized to possess medical cannabis
- enter or be inside a cannabis retail store or production facility
- participate in the growing of cannabis at home, or work in an environment associated with cannabis
- promote or advertise cannabis
- operate a vehicle (whether or not it is in motion) with cannabis in it unless the cannabis belongs to an adult passenger, is from a federal producer and is still in unopened original packaging or not readily accessible by the occupants

In off-campus residences::

- landlords and strata councils can ban cultivation of cannabis plants
- pre-existing tenancy agreements that prohibit smoking tobacco are deemed to prohibit smoking cannabis, but not vaping or other forms of consumption
- cannabis may not be smoked or vaped in common areas of multi-unit buildings

Cannabis Legalization

With cannabis now legal in Canada, post-secondary institutions have an opportunity to address use and related issues in their own context. Campus communities can do this in a way that reflects their educational mandate, philosophy and leadership in the public domain. This guide provides administrators, faculty members, service staff and students with thoughts and questions for campus dialogue relating to:

- restrictions and permissions that apply with the new regulations
- realities around cannabis use in the post-secondary setting
- appropriate avenues in pursuit of a healthier campus climate around cannabis

The guide does not tell campuses what procedures to follow or what policies to implement. Rather, it offers a framework and principles to reflect on and consider. Post-secondary institutions must respect legislation and policies in local jurisdictions. Yet, they also retain responsibility to establish standards of conduct and care appropriate for their environments. This guide seeks to contribute to the conversation on this topic.

Questions useful to start a process of consideration toward reaching such standards might include:

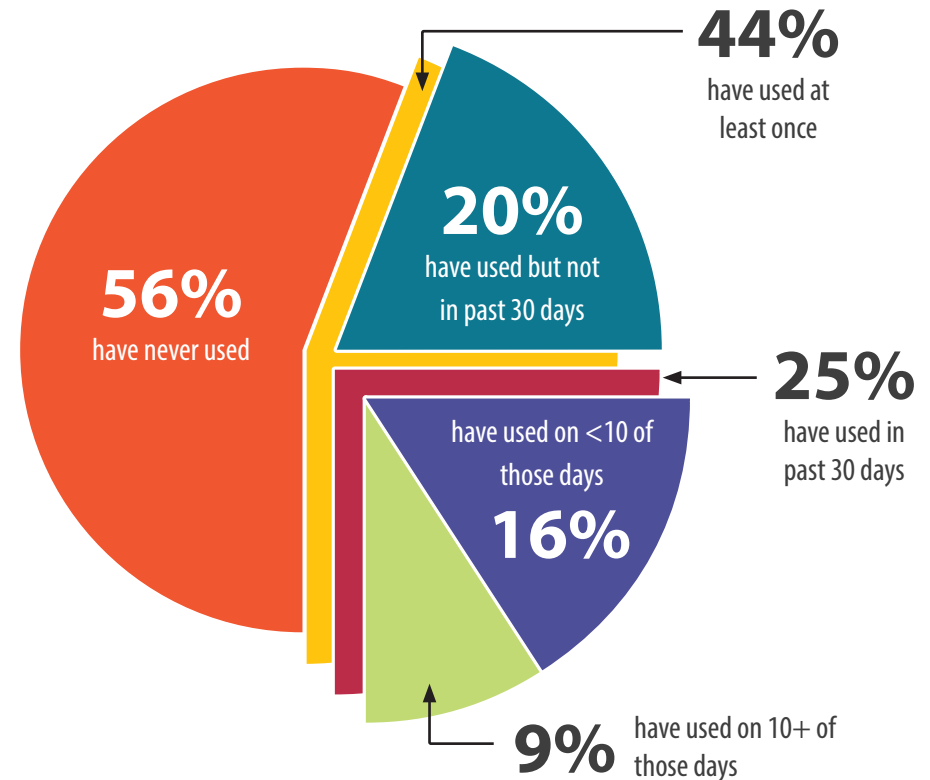
- What is the current campus culture with tobacco and alcohol?
- What do we really know about the phenomenon of cannabis use in our campus context?
- How do our educational vision and values guide us in regard to addressing cannabis use in our context?

Cannabis in post-secondary life

Some members of the campus community (including staff) use cannabis. Though more than 50% of the students have never used it, 25% have used it within the past 30 days, and about a third of those have used it quite often (see figure below).

Broad surveys have tended not to inquire about reasons for or perceived benefits of substance use. Such reasons and benefits need to be recognized if use is to be understood and responded to in appropriate ways.

Cannabis use among post-secondary students



From *National College Health Assessment II: Canadian, 2019* (figures rounded to nearest 1%)

Students report¹ a variety of motives for cannabis use including:

- enjoyment of effects (feeling good, finding it fun, enhancement of activities)
- desire to bond with friends, fit in with a group, celebrate occasions
- use as a coping mechanism (distraction from problems, being depressed, life concerns)
- experimentation (curiosity, finding out what it is like)
- relief of boredom (something/nothing better to do)
- altered perceptions (a different perspective/outlook on the world)
- alleviation of social anxiety (more comfortable, confident, relaxed rather than insecure)
- an aid to sleep and rest

When people have found psychoactive substances attractive, it is generally because of the ways in which these substances contribute to their experience of life. As with the motives reported by students, these reasons tend to cluster around four factors (see diagram at right).

The reasons a person uses cannabis as well as other matters (e.g., personality, health status, previous experience, present mood, relationships, setting) along with rate and mode of intake (e.g., eating, smoking) all factor into the benefits and harms the individual experiences.

Possible near-term (acute) harms include:

- impairment of memory, learning capacity, and psychomotor functioning (for instance, reducing the ability to drive)
- adverse psychological consequences (e.g., increasing anxiety symptoms, experience of panic, paranoia or hallucinations)

As a result, cannabis can impede academic performance and get in the way of opportunities for social interaction and gratifying engagement.



¹ Christine M. Lee, Clayton Neighbors, and Briana A. Woods (2007). Marijuana Motives: Young Adults' Reasons for Using Marijuana, *Addictive Behaviors*, 32(7): 1384–94.

Possible long-term (chronic) harms include:

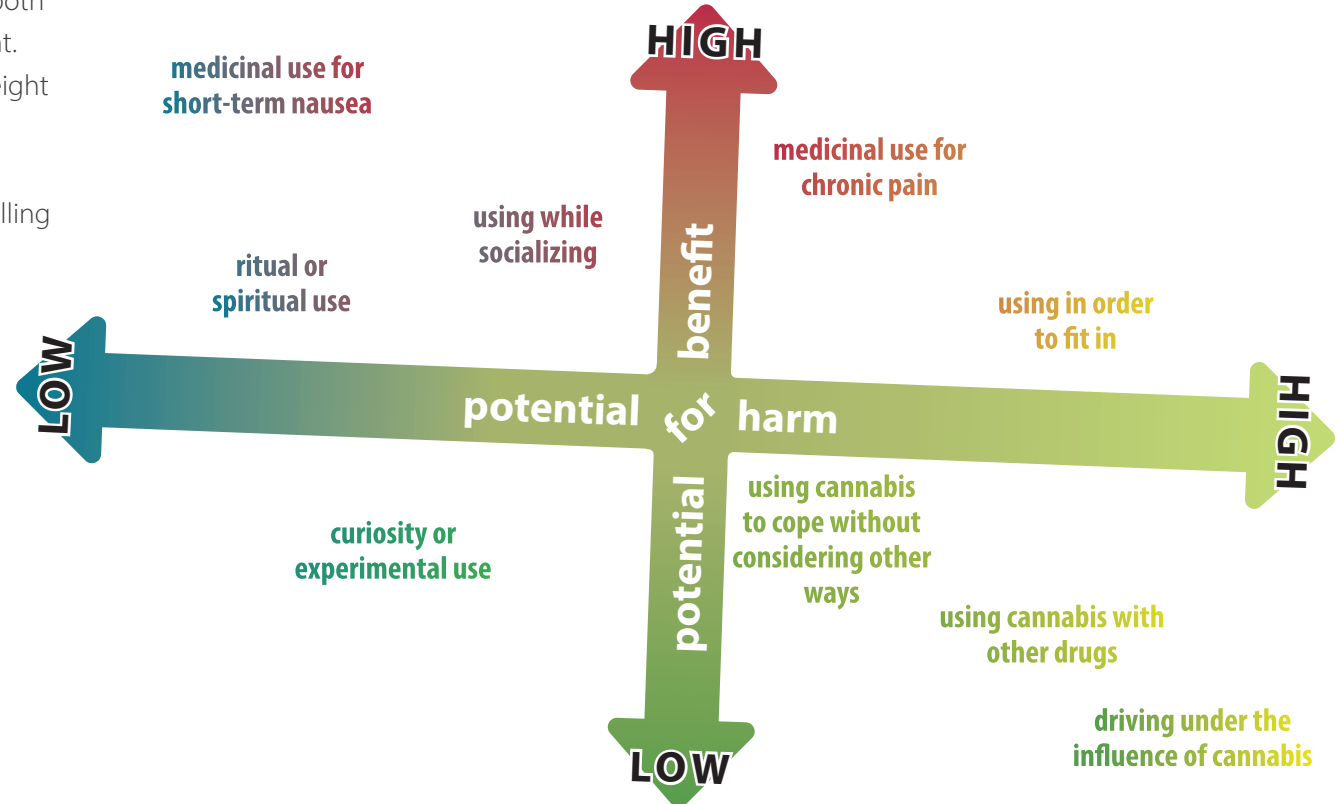
- respiratory difficulties ranging from shortness of breath to regular coughing to persistent bronchitis (contribution to cancer being far less demonstrable than in the case of tobacco smoke)
- development of dependence (in a small minority of cases)

Benefit and harm are not binary opposites on a single continuum but co-exist like two intersecting continua (see diagram at right). Prospects for both benefit and harm should be taken into account. Those who use may at times assign greater weight to perceived benefits than to possible harms. Awareness of this will help avoid a simplistic response detached from meaning for those willing to take risks in regard to cannabis.

Questions to consider:

- » What factors on our campus influence the reasons students use cannabis? How?
- » What implications might attending to both benefits and harms have for campus policy?

The legalization of cannabis recognizes that cannabis use is a mainstream, even if minority, recreational choice among Canadians. Campuses may wish to consider whether there are approaches that accept and respect use without approving and recommending it. Can post-secondary communities normalize a climate of mutual consideration, respect, kindness and caring in regard to cannabis use among other aspects of life in shared space?



Opportunities for campuses in the wake of cannabis legalization

Educate and equip campus members

Building literacy – acquired capacity in knowledge, skills and perspective to relate well to the challenges and opportunities in different areas of life – is integral to the post-secondary mandate. Legalization offers advanced education institutions an interesting opportunity to help students further the critical thinking skills necessary to navigate life in an ever-changing world. A world in which cannabis use is legal for adults and a legal cannabis industry is emerging.

Under prohibition, most cannabis “education” focused on potential health risks. The aim was to change behaviour in predetermined ways through information and social marketing persuasion techniques. This approach to behavioural change has generally proven ineffective. It also has ethical implications. What entitles us to tell people how *we* think *they* ought to live?

A more humanistic view for health education recognizes that health is influenced by living conditions as well as lifestyle choices. People need to increase their ability to take action to manage and improve their well-being. Students, staff and faculty interact with environments in which cannabis is present. Education should help them explore who they are, learn how to make informed decisions, and develop critical thinking and strategies they can call upon when facing new and challenging situations. Cannabis education of this sort can provide students and others with the knowledge and skills to process the often-conflicting information and make personal choices. Such education can also equip students who may wish to participate in the cannabis industry to do so in ways that promote well-being.

Campuses are well equipped to engage their members in comprehensive integrated exploration of the role of cannabis in societies historically and in contemporary communities (including campuses themselves).



Interdisciplinary inquiry can be brought to bear on functions of and structures around cultivation, marketing, consumption and management of cannabis. This critical inquiry can serve not only to acquaint campus members with recurring practices but also to help them examine dominant and dissenting discourse, discern prevalent values and ideals that conflict with those, and expose basic assumptions and normative beliefs. This level of investigation renders normally transparent culture visible for scrutiny and conscious change.

Such exploration and examination should be not only cross-curricular but also extracurricular. So besides being integrated where it fits well into course content across a wide range of different faculties and departments, inquiry can also take place in and beyond health and counselling service centres and events they provide (e.g., clinical sessions, workshops, health fairs). Residence

life gatherings, athletic team meetings and consultations with the general community would be among other appropriate occasions for engagement around cannabis issues and questions. In whatever settings this conversation is taken up, it needs to take on a tenor that is collegial and collaborative. This inquiry-based dialogic approach will help develop the competence to work together in building healthy communities that incorporate the new cannabis industry.

Questions to consider:

- » What settings and forums are we utilizing to engage campus members in open conversations about cannabis and its place in the campus context?
- » How are we promoting dialogue on the socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions of cannabis in our context and beyond?
- » How are we developing a shared understanding of the relationships between personal cannabis management and collective regulation within the campus community?
- » What can we do to help ensure the emerging cannabis industry develops in ways that promote individual and community well-being?

For those who choose to use cannabis, whether students or others, the collective insight of various cultures around drug use merits consideration: in short, “not too much, not too often, and only in safe situations.” Personal and shared reflection on aptly applying such guidance can lead to greater intentionality in consumption as well as more attentive support. Safer cannabis use can best be encouraged within an environment that seeks to understand its meaning as a form of life which has achieved not just legal legitimacy but also cultural normalization within Canadian society, notwithstanding associated risks for harm and minority uptake so far. Appropriate response needs to relate to that complex state of affairs and be multidimensional itself.

Resource:

- [Promoting Health Literacy: Substance Use Policy on Campus Discussion Paper](#)

Safer Use

Some people choose to use cannabis, often with others. It may be helpful to think about the following questions and be aware of some ways to reduce potential harms if you decide to use cannabis.



Some things to think about before using cannabis ...

- **Do I really want to use right now?** Sometimes cannabis helps. Sometimes it doesn't or may make things worse.
- **Can I trust my source (supplier)?** Legal cannabis sources are tested for quality while street cannabis is not.
- **How much THC is in it?** THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) is the main psychoactive component of cannabis. Too much THC can cause unwanted effects (e.g., sleepiness, psychosis, paranoia).
- **How much CBD is in it?** Evidence suggests the cannabinoid CBD (cannabidiol), a non-psychoactive ingredient of cannabis, may block or lower some of the effects of THC and contribute to health benefits associated with cannabis use.

Some other considerations:
It's safer to ...

- **Avoid using too much too often.** Human brains are not fully developed until early adulthood. Regular use (daily or almost daily) over time can lead to dependence. You may start needing it just to feel normal. Using too often can also impact your ability to learn and retain information.
- **Wait at least six hours** before driving (or operating machinery).
- **Avoid smoking.** Vaping or edibles may be less harmful options because they are not as harmful to the lungs. If you do smoke, don't hold your breath. Most of the THC is absorbed in the first few seconds. Water bongs filter out more THC than tar and make you puff harder. If you use a bong, make sure it's made of glass, steel or brass.

... Continued

Safer Cannabis Use (continued)

It's safer to ...

- **Go slowly** when eating or drinking cannabis; these modes take longer to deliver effects. Once those come, you can get higher than expected. Try a little and wait at least an hour before using more. Same advice when trying a new strain – go slowly.
- **Avoid mixing substances.** Adding tobacco to a joint means adding toxins. Drinking alcohol while using intensifies the effects, including impairment, and makes them last longer than expected.
- **Avoid synthetic cannabinoid products.** Designed to copy the effects of THC, synthetics (e.g., K2 or Spice) have contents in most cases untested and unknown, and which can change from product to product, ranging from being really weak to super strong. Synthetic cannabis use has been linked to seizures, irregular heartbeat, panic attacks, agitation, hallucinations and in some cases, death.
- **Skip cannabis** or seek medical advice if you have (or a member of your family has) a history of psychosis or a substance use disorder. Cannabis use can increase the risk that symptoms of these conditions will appear, reappear or get worse. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, it's safest to avoid use.



For more information see:

- [Safer Cannabis Use](#)
- [Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines](#)

Promote a healthy living and learning environment

Cultivating an overall climate on campus of positive interaction and growth together is conducive to more constructive attitudes and empathic stances on various matters of interest and concern within a diverse community.

Focus on connectedness: Efforts to build solid, mutually supportive, healthy ties that foster a sense of belonging can encourage campus members to pursue personal educational goals and aspirations with greater confidence and contribute to the community with a stronger degree of ownership and responsibility. People living in positively connected communities tend to have healthier relationships with substances including cannabis. In such environments, when conversations around topics such as cannabis come up, they more often take the form of

exchanges that are respectful, inclusive, curious, and appreciative, even when there are strong differences of opinion. Engaged participants are more disposed to offer the community the knowledge and skills they possess. Strong healthy connections also encourage campus members to access supports and services when they need them.

Intentionally cultivating connectedness and collegiality among staff and faculty and inviting students to be engaged with them can set a tone for the community. It inspires students to emulate this approach and apply it to their own initiatives within campus life and beyond. Opportunities that encourage students to partner with mentors and peers build the skills for connectedness and equip them to be citizens and leaders contributing to healthy communities in the future. The following also support integration and nurture a culture of care:

- provision of regular recreational means by which campus members can relax and have fun, form positive relationships and develop helpful networks
- opportunities to be involved in voluntary (or credit-earning) service on campus and in the surrounding local community
- institutional adjustments of academic processes and demands to relieve undue stress and minimize isolation that may prompt harmful resort to cannabis or other substances

Questions to consider:

- » What does connectedness mean in the campus setting?
- » How can we better nurture connectedness among faculty and staff?
- » How can we better integrate students into well-connected communities within the larger campus community?

Nurture dialogue: The greater the breadth and depth of engagement among campus members, the healthier and more productive the campus community. Campuses can find many ways of strengthening relationships and foster connectedness among members that leads to more widespread and meaningful engagement. In order to achieve that goal, all of those ways will

involve – in some form or another – dialogue as a way of being and communicating with fellow campus members.

There can be significant difference in beliefs and opinion among campus members on an issue such as cannabis. The challenge is to ensure an atmosphere in which participants can safely share their views, posing constructive questions to themselves and fellow contributors as they give careful attention to each other. Dialogue can bridge divides and reach for understanding that allows the campus community to generate collective support while continuing to relate respectfully to those who cannot fully align themselves with stances adopted by the community. Cannabis legalization provides campuses with an opportunity to involve administration, faculty, staff, and students in evolving a shared understanding and vision for the community vis-à-vis cannabis that accords with and applies an institution's broader goals for itself.

Resources:

- [Building Community: Substance Use Policy on Campus Discussion Paper](#)
- [Cannabis Legalization: A Guide for Workplaces](#)

Questions to consider:

- » In what ways and how well does our campus cultivate a general climate of dialogue among its members?
- » How might we best secure the participation of people with diverging opinions in campus dialogue around cannabis?

Regulate for an inclusive responsible community

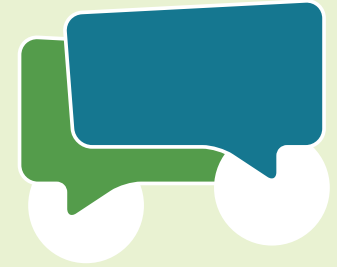
While policy alone cannot produce the positive conditions campuses seek, it does have a role. Recognition of wellness as more comprehensive than the absence of illness or injury provides guidance for the process and product of policy development. It helps institutions appreciate that on an issue such as cannabis parameters for consideration will extend well beyond protection against potential adverse physiological and psychological effects from cannabis use.

Where there is a concerted effort to establish a campus culture of mutual respect, shared consideration and joint accountability, the need for cannabis-specific regulation may be minimal. A collective commitment to supportive conduct can go a long way when addressing concerns. Complaints and disciplinary action should honour rights and responsibilities, while building individual capacity and motivation and restoring and strengthening relational connections.

Campus members can be expected to not use cannabis in contexts where prohibited or where it interferes with formal learning (e.g., classroom sessions and course work activities), where it exposes others to unsafe unpleasant smoke, poses a problem for facility upkeep, and where it contributes to

Dialogue

Dialogue is a conversation in which two or more people seek to understand each other. While talking is a part of the conversation, listening and asking good questions are the more important skills. The goal is not to come away having convinced someone about something but to have gained understanding of another's perspective.



Dialogue is an important tool, especially as we enter an era of legalized cannabis. People have different perspectives on cannabis. We do not need to think and believe alike. However, we do need to live together. That requires that we understand each other and that we respect the needs and rights of others.

Open dialogue with fellow post-secondary stakeholders – administrators, faculty, services staff, students, parents, residence personnel, representatives from the surrounding community – can help create a broad understanding of the divergent views within the campus community. This understanding provides a critical foundation from which to develop shared approaches that respect everyone. Dialogue also helps participants develop the skills for the civil exchange of ideas so needed in democratic communities. In dialogue, we discover new ideas that allow us to evolve our thinking and become lifelong learners.

For Dialogue resources
see [Let's Talk Cannabis](#)

difficulty for personnel in performance of their role. Are timely reminders of such general constraints sufficient to protect health and provide safety? How could these best be communicated? Is there a need to further spell out and demarcate restrictions and, if so, how can this be done in a consistent health-promoting manner?

Limiting cannabis use: Provincial legislation generally prohibits smoking or vaping cannabis in areas where tobacco smoking is not allowed. This would include most indoor areas on campus as well as outdoor areas around doors, windows and air intake (ventilation) ducts. A principle (avoid causing harm to others) that underpins these existing regulations can guide further

considerations and decisions as needed. Where there may be further need to confine outdoor cannabis smoking on campus, three options from tobacco regulation are available.

- Designated non-smoking areas
- Designated smoking areas
- Smoke-free campus policy

Which way?

Following vs. engaging

Campuses often feel pressured to adopt responses implemented by other institutions. This strategy does not allow for critical reflection on the institution's own mandate, values or composition – issues that call for a consistent and inclusive approach that recognizes the distinctiveness of each post-secondary community.

Control vs. consensus

Campuses may be tempted to control cannabis use by imposing a regulatory policy. Such an action does not fit well with broader ideals of advanced education or principles of health promotion. Efficiency can be balanced with commitment to patient, inclusive processes that build shared capacity and acknowledge the enormous diversity of post-secondary populations.

Resource:

- [A Framework for Thought and Action: Substance Use Policy on Campus Discussion Paper](#)

Some questions to consider:

- » What level of evidence would be needed to justify increasing levels of restriction?
- » What effect might this policy have on social connectedness?
- » How best may a campus encourage acceptance and adherence?

Resource:

- [Regulating Use and Marketing of Substances: Substance Use Policy on Campus Discussion Paper](#)

Residences, a special setting: Outdoor restrictions on cannabis use on campus will likely also apply to the immediate exterior surroundings of campus residences. In interior spaces, concerns will center on ways in which cannabis is similar to tobacco such as harmful and unpleasant exposure to second-hand smoke and the fallout of so-called third-hand smoke (residual deposit on surfaces from indoor smoke).

Provincial cannabis regulations dictate no smoking or vaping in common areas of multi-unit residence buildings. Post-secondary institutions may exercise their prerogative to prohibit smoking/vaping within residences where students live. Campuses may also choose to ban cultivation of cannabis plants within those dwelling places or in outside spaces attached to them.

Question to consider:

- » How might residence cannabis policies and regulations contribute to nurturing a residence community committed to mutual health and care?

Resource:

- [A Guide to Promoting Healthier Residence Environments](#)

Medical use, a special case: Campus members, whether resident or commuting, who need to use cannabis for medical purposes, as designated under the [Cannabis Control and Licensing Act](#), are entitled to use cannabis in a campus setting if their treatment regimen requires they take cannabis while in that space. Campuses must make provision for this use. Campuses will need to collaborate with affected individuals to arrive at arrangements that can allow these members to function in their roles without compromising the performance of others around them.

Question to consider:

- » What policies or regulations might be needed to ensure medical cannabis patients have appropriate access to cannabis on campus in ways that do not compromise their connectedness to the campus community?

Retail outlets on campus: There is a robust regulatory regime in place with respect to cannabis retail stores. As with alcohol, campuses may choose to welcome on their grounds a legal cannabis store (one licensed under the [Cannabis Control and Licensing Act](#)). The process for considering and planning such an outlet affords campuses an opportunity to collaborate with the store management on how best to serve the campus community while ensuring purchase and use is informed, thoughtful and responsible.

Questions to consider:

- » What are the advantages and disadvantages in having a cannabis retail store on campus?
- » In what ways might campuses assist stores on or near campus to contribute to community well-being?

Resource:

- [Cannabis Legalization: A Guide for Licensed Private Retail Outlets](#)

Cannabis at university events: There are no provisions in provincial legislation for the sale of cannabis at non-permanent locations. Campus members and guests may wonder about the rules around using cannabis at university-related events. Post-secondary institutions may wish to consider developing appropriate policy, or at least guidelines, for use at events they put on, host or house.

Questions to consider:

- » What are the advantages/disadvantages of allowing or prohibiting the use of cannabis at campus affiliated social events?
- » If cannabis use is allowed at events, how can this happen in a way that minimizes harms, maximizes benefits and respects the rights of all, including non-users?

Resources:

- [Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health-Promoting Universities and Colleges](#)
- [A Framework for Thought and Action: Substance Use Policy on Campus Discussion Paper](#)
- Harward, D.W. (Ed.) (2016). *Well-being and higher education: a strategy for change and the realization of education's greater purposes*. Washington, DC: Bringing Theory to Practice.

Lead by example

The public looks to post-secondary institutions to assist students in developing competencies that can help communities and society flourish.

The [Okanagan Charter](#) recognizes this classical mandate for universities and colleges to lead the way, developing critical thought around health and well-being, implementing health promotion initiatives, and embodying the principles, processes and practices that promote wellness. The legalization of cannabis provides a significant opportunity for campuses to think through this complex social and well-being issue and implement the vision of the Okanagan Charter.

Questions to consider:

- » How can we engage campus communities in developing a response to cannabis legalization that supports members in improving their own well-being?
- » How can we foster and support dialogue in our surrounding communities around cannabis legalization?



Going forward

As a legal substance, cannabis will likely become more socially acceptable to the general public. Rates of cannabis use will presumably depend on the same factors as alcohol and tobacco use. These include price, product promotion, availability, perceived benefits and risks, and the degree to which other options are available for achieving the same benefits. The legalization of cannabis means we must ensure campus communities have the tools to navigate a world where cannabis is available and promoted.

Cannabis legalization provides a variety of regulatory tools to promote a balanced approach to cannabis. We can use them to build individual and community capacity to manage well-being. What's more, legalization invites opportunity for open dialogue with all stakeholders in the campus community.

Rather than focusing only on the dangers of cannabis (i.e., what might happen), campus

communities can choose to build capacity and resilience among members. This requires a focus on how we would like our campus environment to be.

Today, there is space to explore and reflect on how drugs are regulated in our society. We can more comfortably and carefully consider the implications of different approaches to drug regulation, including prohibition and availability through a legal market. How do we as a society decide which approach to use for which drug? How do various approaches affect people who use cannabis in the campus context? In these explorations, cannabis legalization becomes the beginning rather than the end of discussion. It provides multiple opportunities for all stakeholders to shape an inclusive and healthy campus community and perhaps lead the way for other communities in which members work together to improve well-being.

Questions to explore:

- » What would a great campus community look and feel like?
- » How can our campuses contribute to well-being among all citizens?

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