

# Legalizing A Recreational Drug: Cannabis in Canada as a Case Study

Category: Oral Presentation

## Abstract Body

**Objective:** International calls for drug law reform include proposals not only to decriminalize, but also to legalize drugs for both therapeutic and recreational use (eg. psychedelics). This presentation explores events and impacts from cannabis legalization in Canada to provide guidance and contraindications for future policy initiatives with significant relevance for SUDs & behavioural addictions.

**Method:** The presentation is based upon an examination of over 700 sources including academic policy literature, reports from health policy authorities, regulators, investigative journalism, and discussions with cannabis activists and industry employees to identify important processes and events from cannabis legalization that would prove instructive for the legalization of other drugs.

**Results:** From the beginning, the Canadian government's framework for cannabis legalization was one that favoured the strengthening of a new industry over public health protection. This included a private sector industry model, investigations led by appointees with pre-existing involvement and future ambitions with the cannabis industry, and permissive regulation including typically exoneration, and even anonymity for companies committing multiple regulatory violations and even corporate crime.

**Conclusions:** Future drug policy reform initiatives must be framed within the larger body of evidence related to "regulatory capture". This literature has documented a shift in government regulation of industries from a priority for protecting public welfare to one that prioritizes industry welfare and expansion. The evidence for such a shift has been described for agriculture and food, fossil fuels, construction, transportation, mining, pharmaceuticals, and finance. Given the high prevalence of drug problems, drug policy also requires a reformation in the regulatory process for not only existing drug industries, but also for establishing new ones.

## Key Words

- Cannabis/Synthetic Cannabinoids
- Global Health
- Legal Issues
- Legislation
- Policy

Learning Objective # 1

The priority for cannabis law reform in Canada shifted from social justice and public health protection to establishing a lucrative new recreational drug industry with permissive government regulation.

#### Learning Objective # 2

Given the high prevalence of drug problems, drug policy requires a reformation in the regulatory process for not only existing drug industries, but also for establishing new ones. A larger body of evidence on “regulatory capture” in many other industries (eg. agriculture, fossil fuels) provides a helpful framework for understanding the challenges before us.

#### Reference # 1

Task Force on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation. 2016. A Framework for the Legalization and Regulation of Cannabis in Canada: Final Report. Health Canada. December 2016.

#### Reference # 2

DeVillaeer, Michael. 2023. Buzz Kill: The Corporatization of Cannabis. Black Rose Books

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