



Canadian Centre  
on Substance Abuse  
Centre canadien de lutte  
contre les toxicomanies

Partnership. Knowledge. Change.  
Collaboration. Connaissance. Changement.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **National Release of Report on Marijuana by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse** ***Cannabis Regulation: Lessons Learned from Colorado and Washington State***

**Montreal, November 17, 2015** – The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) released today its report, *Cannabis Regulation: Lessons Learned from Colorado and Washington State*, to help promote a national dialogue that will inform “made in Canada” policy options to minimize the potential negative health, social, economic and criminal justice impacts of marijuana use in Canada.

With the purpose of collecting the best available information to support evidence-informed policy advice, CCSA led delegations to Colorado and Washington state in February and August 2015, about a year after retail sales of cannabis began in each jurisdiction. That these two states are using different regulatory frameworks also provided the opportunity to compare the models in terms of both implementation and impact.

The delegations met with stakeholders from a range of perspectives, including public health, regulation, government, enforcement, prevention and the cannabis industry. Despite different perspectives several common themes emerged.

The key message heard was the importance of identifying the purpose driving policy change. In other words, begin by defining the problem to be solved and the goals to be achieved. In Canada, reliable indicators and data for sound policy are based on evidence, public health objectives and human rights standards, including harm reduction. These factors are integral to the new approaches that are being considered.

The delegations also heard the importance of assessing impacts and making incremental changes rather than moving too quickly. The need to invest in effective implementation was another common message from stakeholders in both Colorado and Washington. Adequate time should be allocated to:

- Bringing diverse partners together from the beginning and promoting open, consistent communication and collaborative problem-solving;
- Establishing comprehensive baseline data and conducting rigorous, ongoing data collection to monitor impact;
- Developing a strong regulatory framework and the capacity to administer it;
- Investing in a public health approach that builds capacity in prevention, education and treatment;
- Developing a comprehensive communications strategy to convey details of the regulations prior to implementation, so that the public and other stakeholders understand what is permitted, as well as the risks and harms associated with use;
- Ensuring consistent enforcement of regulations by investing in training and tools for those responsible for enforcement, particularly to prevent and address impaired driving and diversion to youth, and to control the black market.



## Quotes

“Today’s report is founded in the research, policy and knowledge exchange that has been CCSA’s mantra for many years. We are proud to contribute to the ongoing national dialogue that will inform “made in Canada” policy options for cannabis. This report demonstrates the importance and value of multi-sectoral collaboration and the need to engage government, public health, primary care, treatment, prevention, enforcement, industry and regulatory bodies if we are to have an effective, comprehensive, evidence-based approach to cannabis regulation in Canada.”

*Rita Notarandrea, M.H.Sc, C.H.E., Chief Executive Officer, CCSA*

“The rapidly growing and changing landscape regarding cannabis in Canada requires that this issue receive timely attention. The Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health (CCMOH) is supportive of the principles identified in this report – applying available evidence to guide policy change discussions about reducing negative health, social and justice impacts; as well as promoting public health and equitable application of the law. Representing senior public health physicians in Canada, CCMOH looks forward to ongoing involvement in this evolving dialogue.”

*Dr. Robert Strang, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Nova Scotia;  
member and past-chair, Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health*

“The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) recognizes the importance of evidence-based decision making. The CCSA’s *Cannabis Regulations: Lessons Learned from Colorado and Washington State* is an excellent report that will help to inform policy as we move towards a legalized marijuana model. CACP wants to ensure the legalization of marijuana does not compromise public safety. The best practices and areas of concern identified in the CCSA research will assist CACP as we move forward in the dialogue.”

*Chief Clive Weighill, President, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police*

“The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health continues to support a public health approach to cannabis control. The lessons captured in CCSA’s report underscore the importance of comprehensive, evidence-informed policies as the best way to address the health and safety risks associated with cannabis use.”

*Dr. Jürgen Rehm, Director, Social and Epidemiological Research,  
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)*

“If Canada is to proceed with cannabis policy reform, there are certain fundamental considerations that need to be integral to any proposed changes. The Canadian Public Health Association fully supports the reorientation of drug policies towards evidence-based approaches that respect, protect and fulfil human rights, and this report provides a starting point for these important conversations.”

*Ian Culbert, Executive Director, Canadian Public Health Association*

CCSA was created by a federal Act of Parliament in 1988 to provide expert advice, information and support in matters related to substance use disorders and addiction in Canada. CCSA is the only national organization with a legislated mandate to provide evidence-based best advice on these issues to advance research knowledge, inform policy, change practice and improve services for education, prevention, treatment and recovery for Canadians.



CCSA would like to thank the Colorado and Washington stakeholders and Canadian delegation members for their generous contributions of time, expertise, information and advice.

### Media contact

Spokespeople from the organizations listed above will be available for interviews following the news conference. Media interviews can be arranged by **emailing [media@ccsa.ca](mailto:media@ccsa.ca)** with your request or by calling **514-279-4601**.

Please see the [Media Advisory](#) for details about the news conference.



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The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse changes lives by bringing people and knowledge together to reduce the harm of alcohol and other drugs on society. We partner with public, private and non-governmental organizations to improve the health and safety of Canadians.

CCSA activities and products are made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada. The views of CCSA do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Canada.

