



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

## Non-Medical Cannabis Legalization: A Public Health Approach for First Nations Communities in BC

Cannabis and Public Health Forum – April 30, 2019

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# Disclosure Statement

- I have no affiliation (financial or otherwise) with a cannabis producer, processor, distributor or communications organization.



# What Are BC First Nations Saying about ‘Legalization’?

## Common themes:

- Substance Misuse
- Medicinal Benefits
- Youth and Mental Health
- Individual and Community Safety
- Secondhand Smoke
- Drug-impaired Driving
- Safe Access
- Self-Determination



## Data – First Nations and Cannabis

% of FN adults who used cannabis during the past year (RHS)		
	2008-10	2018
Abstinent	67.7	69.7
Monthly Usage	3.2	2.4
Daily Usage	12.4	12.1

- Overall, not much change in usage rates over time
- FN usage in past year was statistically significantly higher than general population
- FN Youth (12-17 y/o): 72.8% had not used cannabis in the past year



## First Nations Perspectives Around Cannabis – 1 of 2

- **First Nations in BC are using cannabis for medical and non-medical purposes, and often for both concurrently**
- **Provincial/Regional engagement suggests that many individuals feel cannabis has a positive impact on their health and wellness**
- **Diverse range of perceived positive benefits:**
  - Emotional and spiritual wellbeing
  - Physical health and mobility
  - Mental health and wellness
  - Social life and relationships
  - Work and school



## First Nations Perspectives Around Cannabis – 2 of 2

- For medical cannabis, common reasons for use include:
  - Problem sleeping
  - Chronic and acute pain
  - Headaches
  - Nausea
  - Muscle spasms
  
- Cannabis viewed as a desirable potential alternative to opioids, alcohol, other illicit drugs and prescription medications (e.g. Valium and Xanax)
  
- High level of interest in using CBD products to deal with pain and other health conditions



## Harm Reduction Approach

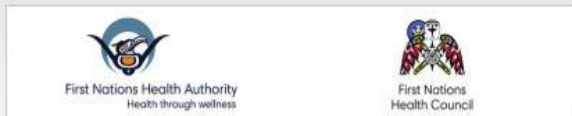
- Legalization replaces an illicit/unregulated substance for a system with known quality and dosage
- Treatment for pain management
- Increased availability of education and health information around risk mitigation and safer choices:
  - safe transportation (e.g. designated drivers)
  - choosing lower-potency products (e.g. THC:CBD ratio)
  - understanding safer methods of use
- Potential of reducing opioid dependency



# What has FNHA said?

- **FNHA public education campaign - [www.fnha.ca/cannabis](http://www.fnha.ca/cannabis)**
- Promotion of Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines
- Blogs: Cannabis use and pregnancy; Mental health risks to youth
- Letter to Communities: ***A Public Health Approach to Non-Medical Cannabis***

May 4, 2018



A message from Grand Chief Doug Kelly, Chair, First Nations Health Council (FNHC) and Dr. Shannon McDonald, Acting Chief Medical Officer, First Nations Health Authority (FNHA)



Grand Chief Doug Kelly



Dr. Shannon McDonald

## Non-medical Cannabis Legalization: What We Have Heard So Far

Common themes from First Nations Communities - BC Public Engagement on Cannabis

- » Substance Abuse and Treatment
- » Medicinal Benefits
- » Keeping our Youth Safe
- » Secondhand Smoke
- » Safety for Individuals and Communities
- » Drug-impaired Driving
- » Safe Access to Legal Cannabis
- » Self-Determination
- » Emphasis on Public Education



We want to hear from you. What are your top health and community considerations?

Visit [www.fnha.ca/cannabis](http://www.fnha.ca/cannabis) for information or email [info@fnha.ca](mailto:info@fnha.ca) with your questions.

Jun 20, 2018

Learn more to make the best choices for yourself and your family



Dr. Nel Wieman

The legalization of non-medical cannabis in Canada is happening October 17, 2018 and we at the FNHA want to provide you with as much information as possible so you can make the best and safest choices for yourself and your family members.

During a recent webinar about the legalization of non-medical cannabis, we heard that people want to know more about two important areas of concern related to cannabis use: 1) the risks to moms and babies through prenatal exposure and, 2) the risks to mental health, especially youth

Let's talk about moms and babies first.





## Community Resource Guidebook – *in development*

- Request from community leaders – desire for information
- Respecting self-determination
  - There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach
  - Diverse views and approaches among communities
- Helping leaders and communities prepare for and adapt to this new post-legalization environment
- Balancing health and safety needs with economic growth and consumer demand
- Regulating consumption and distribution
- Minimizing the harm to our communities, particularly youth



## How FNHA Is Talking About Cannabis - Summary

- FNHA embraces a harm reduction approach
- First Nations in BC have consistently indicated that mental health and wellness is a top priority.
- We recognize that using cannabis as a treatment mechanism may make some people feel better, but it is important to understand the associated risks
- At this time, FNHA does not cover medical cannabis as a benefit. FNHA has assembled an expert panel in this area and is reviewing our policy against emerging clinical research



**MY  
COURAGE**  
IS INDIGENOUS.

Our teachings guide me to make the right choices for me when it comes to cannabis.

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FNHA.ca/cannabis #IndigenousStr



**MY  
PATIENCE**  
IS INDIGENOUS.

Our teachings guide me to reflect on the benefits of waiting until I'm older before trying cannabis.

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**MY  
HEALTH**  
IS INDIGENOUS.

Our teachings guide me to make choices around cannabis that are safer for my body and mind.

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**MY  
PROTECTION**  
IS INDIGENOUS.

Our teachings guide me to understand the impact cannabis has on me and my baby when I'm pregnant or breastfeeding.

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**MY WELLNESS** IS INDIGENOUS



**MY WISDOM** IS INDIGENOUS