

Cannabis
Legalization
in Canada:
The Public
Health Approach
We
Did Not Get

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All-inclusive Disclosure

No funding, affiliations or stocks:

- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Pharmaceutical
- Cannabis
- Illegal drug cartels

Early Calls for a Public Health Approach to Cannabis Legalization in Canada

- Canadian Drug Policy Coalition (Carter & Macpherson, 2013)
- Canadian Public Health Association (2014)
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) (Crepault, 2014)
- Canadian Medical Association (Spithoff et al., 2015)
- others would follow

Liberal Party of Canada Adopts a “Public Health Approach” for Cannabis Legalization

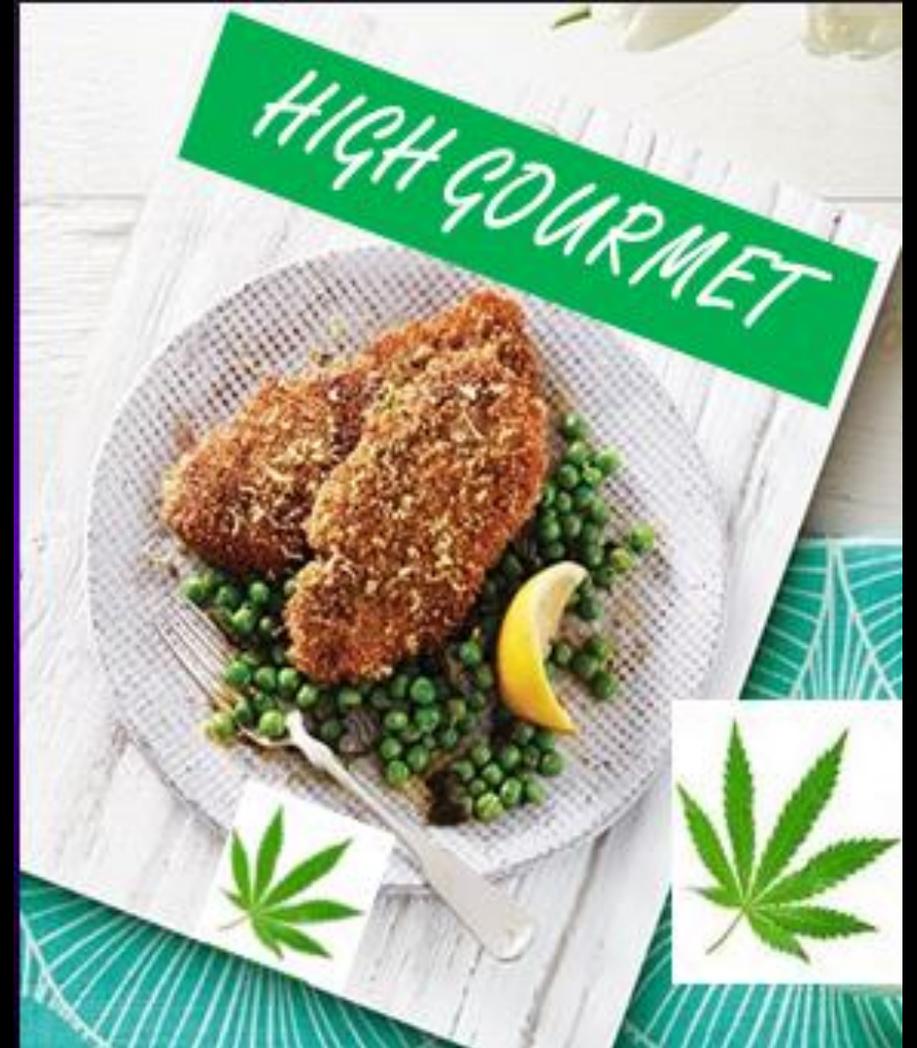
- 2 reports from Task Force on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation (2016a; 2016b)
- Minister of Health announcements
(Health Canada, 2018a; Health Canada, 2018b)
- ‘Summary’, Bill C-45, The Cannabis Act
(Parliament of Canada, 2018)
- BUT,
- TF also favoured “*some form of private sector production*”
- introduces conflict with a public health approach

Drugs: No Ordinary Commodity

- any private sector company wants market expansion
- ok for kale, solar panels, tulip bulbs
- a drug industry: market expansion expands harm (DeVillier, 2017; 2019)
- public health authorities warn against it
- juxtaposition: market expansion & public health protection

What did Task Force hear from Public Health?

- consensus: avoid market expansion
- general support: doing so in 3 ways



1) Adopt a non-profit approach

- Canadian Medical Association (Spithoff et al., 2015)
- Chief Medical Officers of Health of Canada & Urban Public Health Network (2016)
- Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec (Chapados et.al., 2016)

- US: Rand Corporation's Report (Caulkins et al., 2015)
- UK: Expert Panel's Report (Rolles et al., 2016)

2) Resist private industry lobbying

Warnings from:

- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) (Crepault, 2014)
- Canadian Medical Association (Spithoff et al 2015)
- US: Rand Corporation (Caulkins et al 2015)
- UK: Expert Panel (Rolles et al., 2016)

3) Ban all forms of product promotion

- The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) (2016a)
- Chief Medical Officers of Health of Canada & Urban Public Health Network (2016)
- Canadian Public Health Association (2016)
- Canadian Medical Association (Spithoff et al., 2015)
- The Canadian Paediatric Society (Grant 2016)

- UK: Expert Panel (Rolles, et al., 2016)

What did the Task Force Say? What did the Cannabis Act do?

- TF acknowledged:
- *“As with other industries, this new cannabis industry will seek to increase its profits and expand its market, including through the use of advertising and promotion.”*
- Task Force acknowledged receiving *“strong calls”* for *“not-for-profit entities”*
- TF made no recommendations to this effect
- Cannabis Act adopted private sector production

A Compromised Public Health Approach

Task Force Recommendations

Protected public health

- prohibit promotion to children
- prohibit high thc products
- provide public education & prevention programs
- avoid criminalizing youth
- prevent impaired driving

Compromised public health

- allow product promotion to adults
- adopt low minimum age
- allow cannabis edibles
- criminalize illegal trade

Public Health Compromised for Market Expansion

Protected public health

(Small/no impact on market expansion)

- prohibit promotion to children
- prohibit high thc products
- provide public education & prevention programs
- avoid criminalizing youth
- prevent impaired driving

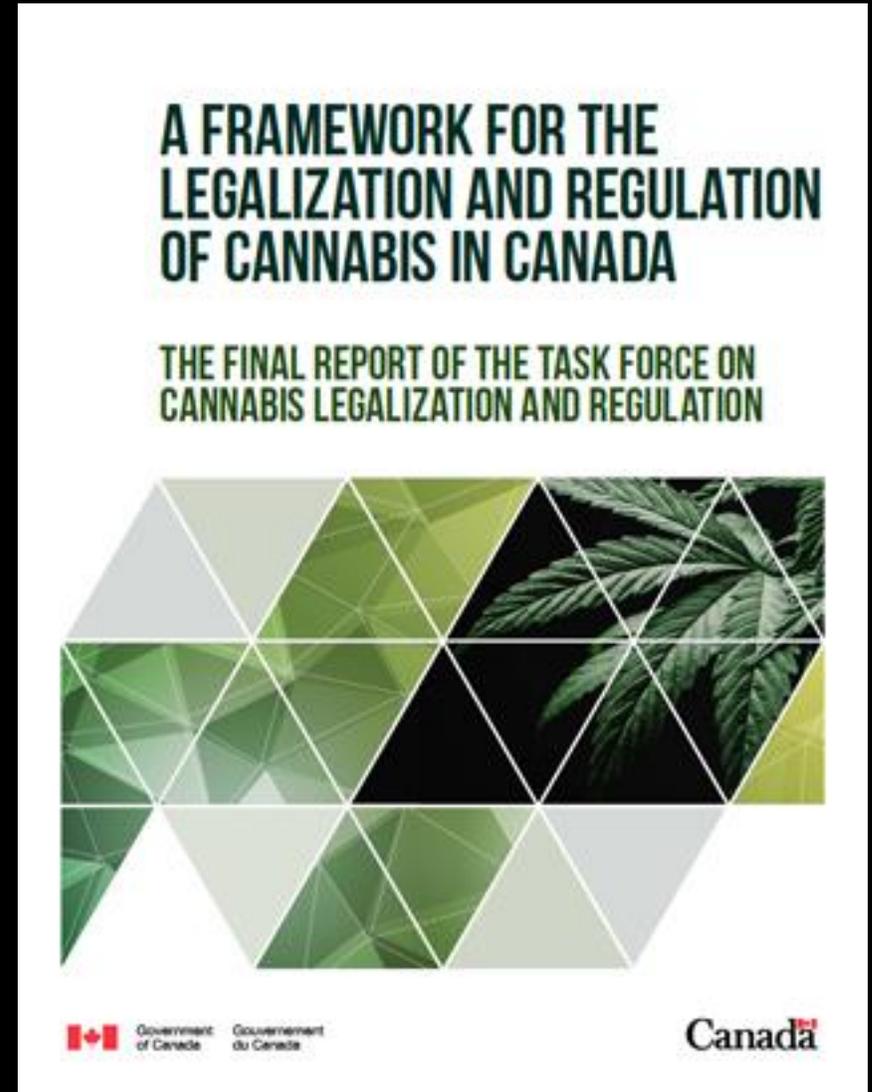
Compromised public health

(Enable market expansion)

- allow product promotion to adults
- adopt low minimum age
- allow cannabis edibles
- criminalize illegal trade

Task Force Recommendations

- protected public health if there was no major encroachment upon capacity for market expansion
- largely adopted by Cannabis Act



Market Expansion

Product Promotion

- TF, Act: not full ban, but restrictions now being gamed (as predicted)
- Health Canada yet to impose any penalties for violations

Minimum Age

- TF: public health had recommended 21 or higher
- The TF recommended & Act allowed 18

Market Expansion (cont'd)

Edibles

- TF: public health stakeholders in Canada advised against legalization of edibles
- TF did not take this advice
- Act deferred until autumn 2019; legal, with restrictions ?

Criminalize Illegal Trade

- alleged threat from illegal trade: children buying cannabis from '*street gangs*' and '*gun-runners*'
- exaggerated & baseless (Capler et al, 2016; DeVillaer, 2017)
- purpose not protection of cannabis users & kids
- public support for harsh provisions in the Act
- reduce competition from illegal cannabis trade

Summary

- Liberal Party compromised its “*public health approach*”
- predetermined priority of market expansion
- at expense of public health

Why is this a serious failure?

- current regulatory approach to drug trades is not working
- a public health & economic disaster

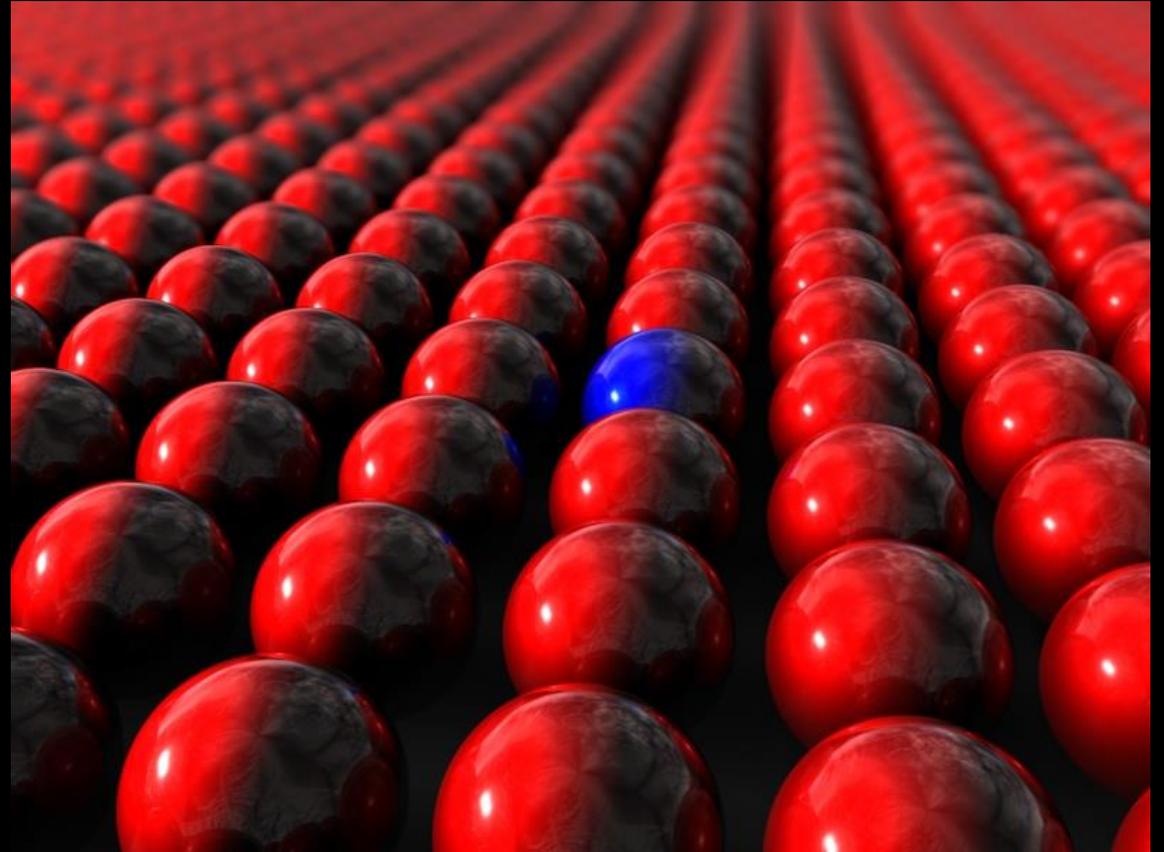
Morbidity, Mortality, Economic Costs Canada 2014

Indicator	Tobacco	Alcohol	Opioids	Cannabis
Hospitalizations	145,801	87,911	6,982	3,836
Workplace Absenteeism	39,727	35,777	4,636	2,109
Premature Deaths	47,562	14,827	2,396	851
Years of Lost Life	326,870	244,144	87,782	18,301
Economic Costs(\$Bs)	12.0	14.6	3.5	2.8

(Cdn Substance Use Costs & Harms Scientific Working Grp, 2018)

Exploring an Alternative

- 3 legal drug industries, driven by market expansion
- 3 public health crises
- public health orgs from Canada, US & UK:
- a non-profit approach



A Non-profit Public Health Cannabis Commission: What Would it Look Like?

- federally-legislated, but independent of govnt
- board of trustees with public health & related expertise
- daily operations similar to current legal private operations
- no market expansion; serve only existing demand

A Non-profit Public Health Cannabis Commission: What Would it Look Like? (cont'd)

- no higher-risk product or product innovation
- no private revenue
- directed only to related public services:
 - prevention, policy analysis, professional training, drug treatment, harm reduction, research

Is a Non-Profit, Public Health Cannabis Commission Possible?

- bold & subversive idea
- evidence-based, multi-nation expert support
- societal shifts:
 - \$38.4 billion price tag
 - court decisions
 - media coverage

Is a Non-Profit, Public Health Cannabis Commission Possible? (cont'd)

- Quebec legislation directs all cannabis retail revenue towards prevention & harm reduction programs (INSPQ, 2017; Quebec Legislature, 2018)
- cause for hope & inspiration keep the conversation going
- if those legally entrusted to protect public health don't do it, then who will?
- what are the consequences if we don't ?

More of this...

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