

Marihuana for Medical Purposes

Canada's Drug Strategy is the federal response to the harmful use of substances. These include illegal drugs, alcohol, pharmaceuticals, inhalants and solvents. The Strategy takes a balanced approach to reducing both the demand for, and the supply of, drugs and substances. It contributes to a healthier, safer Canada through prevention, treatment, enforcement, and harm reduction initiatives.

Research and Compassionate Access

The Government of Canada offers compassionate access to marihuana for Canadians who suffer from serious medical conditions and for whom conventional therapies have not been successful. Health Canada also supports a research program into the safety and effectiveness of marihuana as a medicine.

Health Canada manages a program of clinical research on the risks and benefits of marihuana used for medical purposes. This research is key to better understanding whether, and for which medical conditions, marihuana can be an effective medicine, as well as measuring the risks in relation to its potential benefits.

In July 2001, the Government of Canada introduced the *Marihuana Medical Access Regulations* (MMAR). These regulations define the circumstances and the manner in which access to marihuana for medical purposes is permitted. Canadians wishing to access marihuana for medical purposes must provide a declaration from a licensed physician to support their application confirming, among other things, that conventional treatments for symptoms have been tried or considered and were found to be medically inappropriate.

At present, approximately 800 people in Canada are authorized by Health Canada to possess marihuana for medical purposes. Individuals who are authorized by Health Canada, or are applying for authorization to access marihuana for medical purposes, currently have three options for obtaining a supply: they can grow for themselves with

a Personal-Use Production Licence; they can designate someone they know to cultivate on their behalf with a Designated-Person Production Licence; or, they can apply for Health Canada's supply of dried marihuana or marihuana seeds.

A Canadian company has been licensed to cultivate and produce for the Government of Canada a consistent and quality marihuana product that is fully characterized and tested and which meets the needs of researchers and patients licensed under the Regulations.

As part of the ongoing refinement of Canada's approach to medical marihuana, the Government has recently amended the *Marihuana Medical Access Regulations* to streamline the application process for Canadians seeking access to marihuana for medical purposes. These amendments also provide the basic authority for a pilot project to assess the feasibility of distributing marihuana for medical purposes through the conventional pharmacy-based drug distribution system.

The amendments maintain an appropriate balance between providing seriously ill persons with compassionate access to marihuana with the need to regulate marihuana, a controlled substance and unapproved therapeutic product.

The recent amendments to the MMAR which came into force on June 7, 2005 are available on the Canada Gazette website
<http://canadagazette.gc.ca/partII/2005/20050629/html/sor177-e.html>

More information on Canada's approach to access to marihuana for medical purposes is available on the Health Canada website at
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/marihuana/index_e.html

The Marihuana Medical Access Regulations (MMAR) are available on the Justice Canada website at
<http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/C-38.8/SOR-2001-227/index.html>

To learn more about Canada's Drug Strategy, please visit www.healthcanada.gc.ca/cds

Find out what governments, non-governmental organizations, and other partners are doing – National Framework for Action – Visit
www.healthcanada.gc.ca/cds-nfa

