

MEDICAL CANNABIS/MARIJUANA

What is medical cannabis/marijuana?

According to Health Canada and physicians who treat patients with cannabis, it can be used to relieve symptoms associated with a wide range of conditions. Despite some of the stigma associated with cannabis, it does have many medical purposes.

Top 15 illnesses/conditions:

1. Chronic Pain/Fibromyalgia
2. Cancer pain/effects of chemotherapy
3. Anxiety/depression/PTSD
4. Crohn's disease/IBS/ulcerative colitis
5. Insomnia
6. Multiple Sclerosis (MS)
7. Parkinson's disease
8. ALS
9. Osteoarthritis/Rheumatoid Arthritis
10. Migraines
11. Glaucoma
12. Dystonia
13. Alzheimer's
14. Epilepsy
15. HIV/AIDS



What do workers, employers and unions need to consider?

Currently in Canada, commercial production and distribution of marijuana for medical purposes is Federally regulated. As with any prescribed or over the counter medication, there are side effects that need to be considered when assessing risks to the individual's safety or the safety of others.

For example, while under the influence of the medication:

- Does the person have the ability to perform the job safely? (e.g. driving, operating machinery, use of sharp objects)
- Is there an impact on cognitive ability or judgement?
- Any other side effects of the medical condition or the treatment that need to be considered.

While it is not appropriate for the employer to ask for specific medical findings and diagnoses from the employee or their health professional, employees may wish to consider informing their employer if a medical procedure or treatment may impact their ability to perform their job safely. If the organization has a substance use/abuse policy, it may be necessary to disclose the use of marijuana for medical purposes.

Employers should review any workplace policies involving drug and alcohol use, in consultation with the health and safety committee and union. The focus of the policy should be on "impairment" or "under the influence", and the ability to do the work safely. Policies should be inclusive and consider any prescribed drug or substance that is used medically (or otherwise).

Note: the use of medical marijuana does not entitle an employee to be impaired at work, nor can the use of medical marijuana allow that employee to endanger their own safety or the safety of others.

Do employers have a duty to accommodate?

Yes. Employees can ask for accommodations due to their medical condition. For workplaces, the duty to accommodate is required by federal and provincial human rights legislation, and this right includes those who may use medical marijuana as part of their treatment for a condition. Employers have this duty to accommodate, up to the point of "undue hardship".

With legislation regarding the legalization coming into effect in January 2018, the conversation around medical cannabis and benefit coverage has just begun. Your union endeavors to keep you informed as new information arises.

Medical Cannabis and benefit coverage

In April 2017, Loblaw, a multi-national grocery chain made a bold step and announced its inclusion of medical marijuana into its' benefit plan. With a plan that represents more than 45,000 workers this sounds progressive and forward thinking and it appeared that Loblaw was going to be the game changer. However after closer look at the new benefit policy it was uncovered that it was a small step. The company will only be covering medical marijuana used to treat the symptoms of multiple sclerosis, and for the treatment of the side-effects of chemotherapy for cancer patients. Additionally, the coverage stops at \$1500/year.

The legalization of marijuana and the insurgence of prescription cannabis has brought many concerns to the forefront when considering the safety and security of our members. As legislation and regulations change so does the union and its workplaces.

Methods of administration

There are various methods of administration of cannabis. Each administration method can be used for different conditions or desired effects.

Smoking – the traditional method

This is most likely associated with the recreational method of ingestion. For medical purposes, it provides an almost immediate effect of symptom relief. Due to the quick onset, it's easy to control the dosage and can be adjusted, where necessary. However, there are negative effects concerning potential respiratory effects and the ability to function.

Vaporization – the “healthy” alternative

This is thought to be less harmful than smoking. Vaporization provides the same quick relief as smoking because the product can enter the blood stream quickly. Vaporization is similar to the administration of an inhaler. Both smoking and vaporization are good options for patients who need instant relief from issues such as pain, fibromyalgia, and many other conditions.

Cannabis Oil/Tinctures – the additive

Oils and tinctures are concentrates of marijuana that can be added to products such as food or drink or consumed on their own. Some oils are added to pill capsules and are swallowed like traditional medication. Oils tend to be the method used to give high CBD medications to people with conditions like epilepsy because they can be accurately made and dosed. Tinctures, a concentration made with an alcohol base tends to be slightly less potent than oils. Tinctures and oils can be helpful for quick relief, accurate dosing, and to get the medications more directly to the gastrointestinal tract without consuming an edible.



Edibles – creative consumption

Edibles are trickier since they take longer (1-2 hours) after consumption for effects to be felt. Due to slow onset, dosing and prescriptions are difficult. Most edibles do not contain the percentage of THC/CBD that is listed on the package. However, edibles tend to have a longer lasting effect than other administration methods. Edibles are often used for people with loss of appetite in cancer, anorexia, or AIDS to promote appetite.

Topical – the personal touch

Topical products are a lesser known form of medical marijuana but are very effective for people with inflammation and pain. Topical products are absolutely free from any physco-active properties. Topical products allow people to experience the pain relief from cannabis without the potential side effects of ingesting too much cannabis. They are particularly helpful for people who have arthritis, fibromyalgia, or similar pain issues.

History of Cannabis/Marijuana



Humans have been cultivating cannabis for at least 6000 years, which would make it one of our earliest crops. First evidence of the plant's cultivation comes from East Asia and ancient text show it was used to relieve conditions ranging from constipation to malaria.

Marijuana (also called weed, pot, grass, etc.) is a tobacco-like greenish or brownish material consisting of the dried flowering, fruiting tops and leaves of the cannabis plant, *Cannabis sativa*, the hemp plant. Cannabis has been used for various reasons throughout history. Originating in temperate climates of Asia, it can be used recreationally, medicinally and practically in things such as rope or textiles when in the hemp form.

Research into the psychoactive ingredients in cannabis led to the isolation of delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main psychoactive ingredient, followed by continuing research into the properties of cannabinoids – compounds derived from or based on chemicals specific to the *cannabis sativa* plant.

Cannabinoids are the active chemical ingredients produced by the cannabis plant. More than 100 different cannabinoids have been identified, but research has focused on only two of them so far: delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD).

- THC is the substance (plant's sticky resin) known to cause the psychoactive effects or the “high” felt from cannabis.
- CBD lacks nearly any psychoactive effect. It is an anti-inflammatory and considered the most useful active substance for medical cannabis use.