

HIV/AIDS and the Therapeutic Use of Cannabis

Adopted by the Canadian AIDS Society's Board of Directors, May, 2004.

Context

On February 14, 1998, the Canadian AIDS Society's Board of Directors adopted a position statement on HIV/AIDS and the medical use of marijuana. The position statement is now being updated to reflect the developments of the last six years. Please refer to the Background Paper for information that supports the position.

Position Statement

On May 20th, 2004, CAS' Board of Directors adopted its new position statement on the therapeutic use of cannabis. The Canadian AIDS Society's Board of Directors

- believes that people living with HIV/AIDS should have access to cannabis for therapeutic purposes in the treatment of HIV/AIDS through a compassionate framework;
 - supports the need for more clinical studies on all of the active ingredients in cannabis and their effects on health and strongly supports the development of a Canadian research agenda on cannabis;
 - believes that Health Canada must expand its research agenda and funding to include compassion societies and university partnerships;
 - supports including compassion clubs on Health Canada's Stakeholder Advisory Committee on Medical Marijuana;
 - recognizes the need to address the remaining barriers to access to cannabis for therapeutic purposes through Health Canada's Marijuana Medical Access Regulations;
 - believes that people living with HIV/AIDS should have a choice as to the cannabis product they want to consume, and should have access to a safe, legal, reliable, affordable, and fresh source of cannabis, with an option for an organic source;
 - believes that people living with HIV/AIDS should continue to be allowed to be self-sufficient and produce their own supply of cannabis;
 - supports the pilot project for distribution in a pharmacy in British Columbia and hopes that this project will extend into pharmacies across Canada;
 - hopes that Health Canada will provide a few varieties of cannabis strains, with an option for an organic source;
 - encourages Health Canada to extend cultivation contracts to a variety of growers that currently have years of experience and expertise;
 - supports the inclusion of compassion club in a distribution model for cannabis, as dedicated cannabis distribution centres;
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- strongly supports the development of measures to minimize stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS who choose to use cannabis as part of their treatment and care;
 - proposes that a physician's diagnosis and a patient's completion of the forms should suffice to obtain authorization to possess and/or grow cannabis;
 - supports a re-examination of Canada's drug laws and policies within the framework of substance use as a health and social issue (see position statement on Drug Laws and HIV/AIDS);
 - fears that Bill C-10, a decriminalization Act to amend the Contraventions Act and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, discriminates against low-income Canadians by imposing fines for possession of small amounts of cannabis and feels that decriminalization only perpetuates prohibition and maintains the black market;
 - favours a controlled legalization system for cannabis in Canada, where the production, distribution and consumption are regulated, designated cannabis distribution centres are established and recognized, and appropriate prevention messages and harm reduction strategies are developed;
 - recognizes that Canada must respect its international obligations under current conventions and encourages Canadian officials to officially request the declassification of cannabis and its derivatives from the international conventions as part of a public health approach, while including rigorous monitoring and evaluation of cannabis distribution in Canada.
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