

Cover Story



Cannabis Legalisation: How is Canada doing now?

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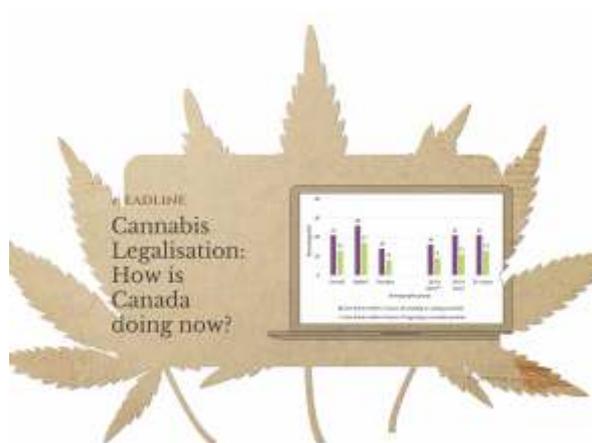
Cover photo: This issue's cover features a graph from the Canadian Cannabis Survey 2021: Summary (Published in the <https://www.canada.ca/> website of Health Canada – the Canadian State Health Service¹)

Graphic design: Upula Vishwamithra Amarasighe

Canada was the second country to legalise cannabis for recreational use in the world, following Uruguay who did it in 2013 (1-2). Influenced by a strong campaign initiated in 2015, Canada legalised cannabis in 2018, amidst the concerns expressed by local and global public health experts (1, 3). Since then, Canada is used as an example by lobbyists to convince governments, policymakers and the public to follow suit all over the world, including in Sri Lanka.

Fortunately, Canada is adopting a scientific approach in dealing with this new policy change, by conducting an annual survey from 2017 on a range of selected cannabis related indicators. The survey includes around 10 000 study participants, representing age, sex, and user status, distributed in all Canadian states (1). Exploring the trends observed prior to legalisation, Canada provides evidence to the global public health advocates to develop scientific counter-arguments against the lobbying of the cannabis popularization campaign, which is strongly backed by the tobacco industry.

The image highlighted in the cover page depicts findings related to driving under the influence of cannabis from the aforementioned survey (1). It, and other findings of this survey, implies how harmful cannabis can be for the health of the public, evidence contrary to it being promoted as a substance that is relatively less harmful compared to tobacco and alcohol. This fact is further supported by other evidence from Canada and other countries, which has shown a significant increase in road traffic accidents due to driving under the influence of cannabis (4-7), thus dismissing the claim of cannabis



being a “harm-reduction agent” by the cannabis industry and various front groups lobbying the governments.

Ironical as it sounds, both tobacco and alcohol industries - almost all multi-national tobacco companies and some beer companies – are among the top investors in the North American Cannabis Industry, the current pioneer of the trade (8-9). Thus, it is extremely important for the public health advocates and community physicians to stay updated about the latest evidence on cannabis, not only related to its harm but also about the current strategies and tactics used by the industry to popularise an addictive substance with the aim of increasing their profits, trading off the health and wellbeing of our communities and populations.

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