

# Uruguayans sign up for state cannabis in world first

May 2 2017

---

Pot smokers in Uruguay on Tuesday became the first in the world to sign up to buy state-vetted cannabis for recreational use, as pharmacies aim to start selling it in July.

Far from the cannabis cafes of the Netherlands and other states that have decriminalized pot, this small South American country is the first to fully legalize consumption of the drug all the way from production to sale.

Already allowed by the leftist government to grow the weed in their homes and smoke it in clubs, Uruguayans in a few weeks will be able to buy it from the chemist along with their shampoo and aspirins.

"This is a great step forward in the evolution as citizens," said Marcos Ferreira, 41, one of the people queuing in a small line to sign on to the Cannabis Register at a post office in central Montevideo.

"Uruguay is innovating to see if we get results," added Ferreira, who works in the tourist sector.

## Cheap and cheerful

The move is the last step in implementing a 2013 law that fully legalized the production, sale and consumption of marijuana.

Buyers must sign up, submitting their fingerprints, to ensure they do not exceed the monthly maximum purchase of 40 grams (1.4 ounces).

The cannabis is grown at secret plantations near the capital by private companies regulated by the state.

A gram of pot will cost \$1.30, the secretary general of the National Drugs Council, Diego Olivera, said last month.

"That's less than half the price on the black market," said the first person in line at the post office on Tuesday, shop worker Yamila, 26.

"Young people and kids will go anywhere to buy marijuana. It is very expensive and you don't know what you're taking," added Yamila, who declined to give her last name.

"Now I can go by myself to a pharmacy and order the product," she said, showing her registration slip to the news cameras.

"It's better, more efficient and safer."

The council's top official, presidential aide Juan Andres Roballo, said last month that sales in pharmacies were expected to start "sometime in the first two weeks of July."

## **Criticism**

Some lawmakers still oppose the law to legalize marijuana, passed under the colorful leftist former president Jose Mujica.

A poll at the time indicated that nearly two thirds of Uruguayans opposed the law.

It made an uncomfortable inheritance for his ally and successor, current President Tabare Vazquez, a cancer doctor.

Vasquez passed strict anti-smoking legislation during his first presidential term from 2005 to 2010.

To accompany Tuesday's launch, the government published videos online warning of the health risks of cannabis.

But it insisted the law would help fight the violence and crime of the drug trade.

The receipt handed to smokers signing up on Tuesday bore a printed phone number for information and help for drug problems.

## **If you sell it, will they come?**

The governing Frente Amplio party has insisted it will not allow "cannabis tourism" to invade the country.

Only Uruguayans or foreigners with permanent residency permits can sign up to the register.

Ferreira, the tourism worker, said he thought tourists should be included too, as a way of drawing foreign revenue to this country of 3.4 million people.

Manuel Martin, who has both Spanish and Uruguayan nationality, says he moved all the way from Spain to take advantage of the marijuana law.

"It was a turning point," he told AFP, standing in line to sign up on Tuesday.

"It is a blessing from God to be here and be able to register. What's more, we can buy it in pharmacies with a guarantee of quality, not just buy any old thing in the streets," he said.

"I came to Uruguay especially for this."

© 2017 AFP

Citation: Uruguayans sign up for state cannabis in world first (2017, May 2) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-05-uruguayans-state-cannabis-world.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.