

Canada primed for pot legalization

October 16 2018, by Jacques Lemieux, Michel Comte



A Montreal cannabis store owned by the SQDC (Société québécoise du cannabis), a day before the legalization of cannabis in Canada

Pot stores across much of Canada were poised to throw open their doors Wednesday as the sale and recreational use of cannabis is made legal for the first time by a major Western country.

Stores in St. John's, capital of eastern Canada's Newfoundland province, will be the first to open their doors to pot enthusiasts as of 12:01 am local time on Wednesday.

"I'm going to have a lot more variety than the black market dealers, so you have a lot more choice at our store. The prices are very comparable," Thomas Clarke, owner of THC Distribution store, told public broadcaster CBC.

On the eve of legalization, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau defended the historic but controversial change, which has been welcomed by entrepreneurs but sharply questioned by medical professionals.

"We're not legalizing cannabis because we think it's good for our health, we're doing it because we know it's not good for our children," he said as he arrived in parliament.

"We know we need to do a better job to protect our children and to eliminate or massively reduce the profits that go to organized crime."

Canada's Cannabis Act, which fulfills a promise Trudeau made in the 2015 election campaign, lifts a 95-year prohibition, and makes Canada only the second nation after Uruguay to legalize the drug.



A warning label on 1gram of cannabis is seen at Up's cannabis factory in Lincoln, Ontario

Demand is such that retailers in Manitoba and Nova Scotia retailers are expecting to quickly run out of product, citing a supply shortage.

In Ontario, buyers will have to wait for their pot to arrive in the mail, after it is ordered online—until the opening of retail storefronts in 2019.

773 tonnes of cannabis

Canadians consumed 773 tonnes of cannabis in 2017.

Despite the government's hopes, the black market is not expected to disappear overnight. To make that point, the CD Howe Institute noted that the federal government has licensed enough producers to supply only 30 to 60 percent of demand in the first year.

Bill Blair, a former police chief in Toronto who is Trudeau's pointman for pot legalization, remains optimistic, however, that the legal market can grab as much as half of share of the market from illicit dealers within the first year.

"Many people think of legalization as an event, but it's a process," Blair told AFP.



Employee Jason Gagne trims cannabis plants at Up's factory in Lincoln, Ontario

"For almost a century, criminal enterprises had complete control of this market, 100 percent of its production and distribution and they profited in the billions of dollars each year. I suspect they're not going to go gently into the night," he said.

Fully shutting down the black market will likely take up to four years, according to Justice Department documents cited by Canadian media.

All will depend on the selling price of legal weed being lower than the street price.

According to Statistics Canada, [black market](#) prices have fallen in the past year to an average of Can\$6.79 per gram.

That prompted some licensed retailers to drop their pricing schemes to better compete, such as in Quebec where it will sell for Can\$5.29 per gram including taxes, officials announced Tuesday.

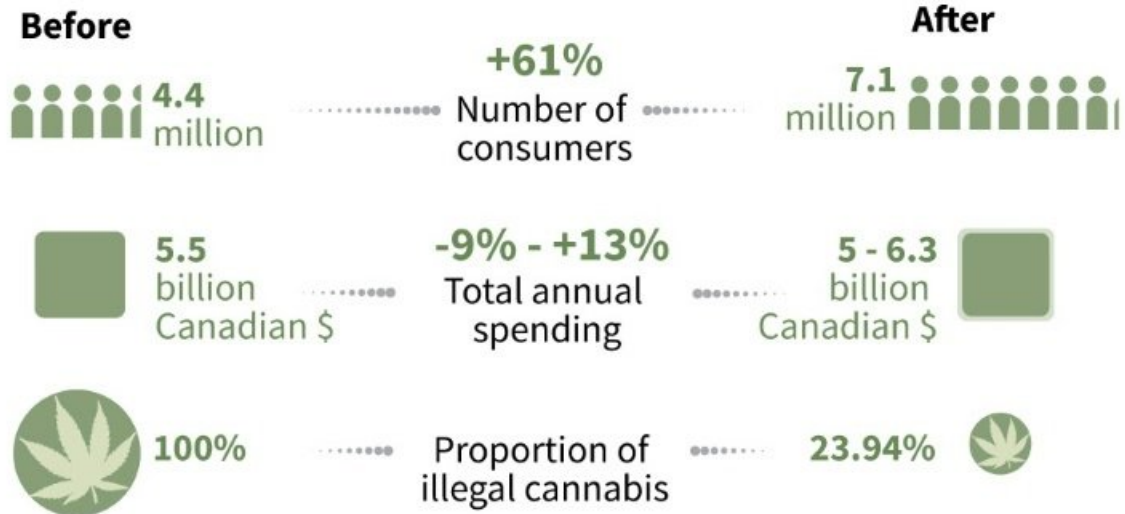
"There is no doubt that Canadians are in unknown waters," Brian Palmer, president of the Canadian Police Association, said Monday, while assuring citizens that police are ready to stop drug-impaired drivers.

Opposition parties accuse the government of having rushed legalization, saying municipalities, police and [public health officials](#) are struggling with health and law enforcement implications of legalization.

Legalisation of cannabis in Canada

Estimated consequences of legalising recreational cannabis

(According to a study published on Sept 21, 2018)



Source: Statistics Canada

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Estimates of the consequences of legalising recreational cannabis in Canada.

Some doctors have also criticized the move. But Blair insists legalization aims to improve health outcomes.

"We have developed a public health framework for the regulation of cannabis that focuses very clearly on social and health harms for the first time," he said. "It's not a criminal model, it's not a commercial model, it's a [public health](#) model."

In regards to youth and pot, he said: "Police will be able to seize the drug, issue a ticket, where it's appropriate take kids home to their parents, and render that situation safe without giving that kid a lifelong stigma of a criminal record."

"The fact that some individuals want to cling to a prohibition model that has led to the highest rates of [cannabis](#) use of any country in the world is a little shocking to me."

According to a recent Abacus Data poll published on Monday, a majority of Canadians (70 percent) accept or support legalization.

If anything goes wrong, however, the Trudeau administration is likely to suffer for it in next year's general election, Abacus president Dave Colletto told Canadian media.

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