

Municipalities and Cannabis: A Public Health Perspective

Cannabis use may have significant health risks, particularly among young people, and can lead to addiction ([see Health Harms of Cannabis Use](#)). The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) has developed research-based [Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines](#) to address these potential risks⁵. Municipalities have an important role to play in creating an environment that decreases the risk associated with cannabis use, and supports healthy decision-making around cannabis use, particularly among young people.

Municipal Role with Youth

The adolescent brain is developing until 25 years and older and regular cannabis use can affect normal development of memory, cognition, judgement and planning with long- term consequences.

Municipalities have an important role in promoting health and preventing problematic substance use among adolescents.²

- A youth-friendly community is one that is committed to supporting positive youth development; building the skills and resilience of youth and their families through access to safe, free recreational and social spaces, and school- or community-based organizations.⁴
- Consider incorporating youth's voice in planning and development.²
- Promote positive social norms and prevent exposure to cannabis by reducing access and availability of substances through municipal alcohol and cannabis policy and by-laws.^{2,4}
- Communicate risks with cannabis use and driving.

Municipal Role to Displace the Illicit Cannabis Market

In an effort to displace the cannabis illegal market, the provincial government has created a regulated on-line retail and a private retail model. As the regulator for private cannabis retail in Ontario, the Alcohol Gaming Commission of Ontario has the authority to license, regulate and enforce the sale of cannabis in privately run stores in Ontario

The presence of retail stores will allow people without financial credit or a personal address to access safer products, however their location, number or business hours may pose risks to youth. In order to mitigate some of these risks, consider the following when providing comments on whether the proposed site for a cannabis retail store is in the public's interest ([see Cannabis Retail Outlets: Considerations for Municipalities](#)):

- Reduce cannabis retail outlet density through minimum distance requirements (at least 300 metres) between cannabis retail outlets and limits on number in your community
- Prevent the role-modeling of cannabis use and reduce youth access through minimum distance requirements (at least 500 metres) from youth-serving facilities such as child care centres and community centres
- Discourage the co-use of cannabis and other substances by discouraging co-location and minimum distance requirements (at least 300 metres) between cannabis and alcohol or tobacco retail outlets to reduce risks associated with impaired driving
- Protect vulnerable residents by limiting cannabis retail outlets in low socioeconomic neighborhoods and other sensitive areas enacting minimum requirements
- Reduce cannabis consumptions and harms by limiting late night and early morning retail hours.

Municipal Role to protect the health and safety of individuals from exposure to second hand cannabis smoke

Municipalities can use the Smoke Free Ontario Act 2017 (SFOA) to restrict the use of cannabis, tobacco and vapour products together in a municipal smoking by-law. The SFOA 2017 includes prohibitions of smoking or vaping cannabis in all places where it is prohibited to smoke or vape tobacco. This Act made all enclosed public places and workplaces (such as restaurants, bars, private clubs, work vehicles and offices) 100% smoke-free. Regulations included all vehicles carrying children under the age of 16 smoke-free (January 2009) and prohibits smoking on outdoor hospitality patios (Legion and other veterans organizations are exempted), hospital grounds, and outdoor playgrounds and sport fields. The sale of tobacco products on post-secondary educational campuses were also included within these regulations (2015).

Further restrictions on places where smoking, vaping and cannabis use are prohibited include a:

- 9 metre perimeter around restaurant or bar patios
- 20 metre perimeter around school property
- 20 metre perimeter around children's playgrounds and publicly owned sporting areas
- 20 metre perimeter around community recreational facility grounds. (7)

Enhancements to the SFOA 2017 can be added to municipal smoking by-law which will further protect youth and all community members from second hand smoke. Examples might include all parks and playgrounds, municipal trails, street fairs and festivals, parade routes, parking lots, 9 metres from unenclosed bus stops, multi-unit dwellings and supportive housing). Exclusions that may be considered include traditional and or sacred tobacco that is used and kept sacred by Indigenous communities, for traditional Indigenous cultural or spiritual purposes and/or medical cannabis use.

The Health Unit is available to support municipalities in helping draft municipal by-laws, provide sample by-laws and consult as well as provide support to municipal by-law enforcement staff.

References:

¹The Cannabis Licensing Act (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/18c12> (accessed December 5, 2018)

²The Chief Public Health Officer Report on the State of Public Health in Canada: 2018. Preventing problematic Substance Use in Youth (retrieved 2018-12-05) <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/corporate/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-public-health-canada/2018-preventing-problematic-substance-use-youth/2018-preventing-problematic-substance-use-youth.pdf> (accessed December 5, 2018)

³Smoke Free Ontario Act (2017) <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/17s26> (accessed December 5, 2018)

⁴Strategic Framework to help Ontario's Youth Succeed: Stepping Up <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/youthopportunities/steppingup/steppingup.pdf> (accessed December 5, 2018)

⁵Fischer, B., Russell, C., Sabioni, P., van den Brink, W., Le Foll, B., Hall, W., Rehm, J. & Room, R. (2017). Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines (LRCUG): An evidence-based update. *American Journal of Public Health*, 107 (8). DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2017.303818. (accessed December 5, 2018)

⁶Association of Municipalities of Ontario. Briefing: Municipal governments in the Ontario recreational cannabis framework. <http://www.amo.on.ca/AMO-PDFs/Reports/2018/Briefing-Municipal-Governments-in-the-Ontario-Recr.aspx> (accessed December 5, 2018)

⁷Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Ontario tobacco, vaping & cannabis by-law summary-2023. 2nd ed. Toronto, ON: King's Printer for Ontario; 2023