

# Authorizing Cannabis for Medical Purposes

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### Authorizing Cannabis for Medical Purposes

The legislation of cannabis for recreational purposes came into effect with the Cannabis Act in October 2018, and patients continue to have access to cannabis for therapeutic purposes. The Cannabis Regulations have replaced the Access to Cannabis for Medical Purposes Regulations. Patients can obtain cannabis for medical purposes when a physician or nurse practitioner provides a "medical document", authorizing its use, and determining the daily dried cannabis dose it goes.

With the authorization, patients have the choice whether to (a) buy directly from a federally licensed producer, (b) register with Health Canada to produce a limited amount for personal consumption, (c) designate someone to produce it for them, or (d) buy cannabis on provincial or territorial authorized retail outlets or online sales platforms, if above the legal age limit.

While acknowledging the unique requirements of patients suffering from a terminal illness or chronic disease for which conventional therapies have not been effective and for whom cannabis may provide relief, physicians remain concerned about the serious lack of clinical research, guidance and regulatory oversight for cannabis as a medical treatment. There is insufficient clinical information on safety and efficacy for most therapeutic claims. There is little information on oral therapeutic and food dosages and knowledge on interactions with medications. Besides the need for appropriate research, health practitioners would benefit from unbiased, accredited educational modules and decision support tools based on the best available evidence.

The Canadian Medical Association has consistently expressed concern with the role of gatekeeper that physicians have been called to take as a result of court decisions. Physicians should not feel obligated to authorize cannabis for medical purposes.

Physicians who choose to authorize cannabis for their patients must comply with their provincial or territorial regulatory Colleges' relevant guideline or policy. They should also be familiar with regulations and guidance, particularly:

- Health Canada's Information for Health Care Practitioners – Medical Use of Cannabis (Interim): Summary and Quick Start Sheet<sup>1</sup>
- the Canadian Medical Protective Association's guidance<sup>2</sup>
- the College of Family Physicians of Canada's preliminary guidance Authorizing Dried Cannabis for Chronic Pain or Anxiety<sup>3</sup> and
- the 5-year-old guideline for prescribing medical cannabis in its primary care, published in the Canadian Family Physician<sup>4</sup>

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