

Quotes from the 2002 Canadian Senate report "Cannabis: Our Position for a Canadian Public Policy"

On Users and Uses:

- Close to 30% of the population has used cannabis at least once.
- Cannabis itself is not a cause of other drug use.
- Cannabis use can be a gateway because it is illegal, which puts users in contact with other substances.
- Cannabis itself is not a cause of delinquency and crime.
- Cannabis is not a cause of violence.

On Effects and Consequences:

...the Committee concludes that the state of knowledge supports the belief that, for the vast majority of recreational users, cannabis use presents no harmful consequences for physical, psychological or social well-being in either the short or the long term.

On the Historical Context of Prohibition:

- Early legislation was largely based on a moral panic, racist sentiment and a notorious absence of debate.
- When cannabis was included in the international conventions in 1925, there was no knowledge of its effects.
- The international classifications of drugs are arbitrary and do not reflect the level of danger those substances represent to health or to society.
- Canada should inform the international community of the conclusions of our report and officially request the declassification of cannabis and its derivatives.

On Medical Marijuana and the Federal Government:

The MMAR (Medical Marijuana Access Regulations) are not providing a compassionate framework for access to marijuana for therapeutic purposes and are unduly restricting the availability of marijuana to patients who may receive health benefits from its use.

On Police Practices

- Annual costs for drug enforcement in Canada can be estimated at between \$700 million and \$1 billion.
- Cannabis was involved in 70% of the approximately 50,000 charges in 1999. In 43% of cases (21,381), the charge was for possession of cannabis.
- The uneven application of the law is of great concern and may lead to discriminatory enforcement, alienation of certain groups within society, and creation of an atmosphere of disrespect for the law; in general, it raises the issue of fairness and justice.

On Prevention:

- Prevention strategies in schools should not be led by police services or delivered by police officers.
- The RCMP should reconsider its choice of the DARE program.
- Harm reduction strategies related to cannabis should be developed in coordination with educators and the social services sector.

On Treatment:

- Physical dependency on cannabis is virtually non-existent.
- Psychological dependency is moderate and is certainly lower than that for nicotine or alcohol.
- Most regular users of cannabis are able to diverge from a trajectory of dependency without requiring treatment.
- As a rule, treatment is more effective and less costly than a prison sentence.

On Current Practices:

- We estimate the cost of enforcing the drug laws to be closer to \$1-1.5 billion per annum.
- The principal public policy cost relative to cannabis is law enforcement and the justice system; we estimate this to represent a total of \$300-\$500 million per annum.
- The costs of externalities attributable to cannabis are probably minimal (no deaths, few hospitalizations, and very little loss of productivity).
- The costs of public policy on cannabis are disproportionately high given the drug's social and health consequences.