

Jamie Bly

300231604

ENG1112 – DGD 3

High Time for Canada: A Revolutionary Step Forward

Liberal Plans

Trudeau is a name synonymous with change for many Canadian, whether that change be viewed positively or negatively. Like father, like son, Justin Trudeau has brought change during his time as the Prime Minister of Canada, bringing forth the legalization of marijuana. The legalization of marijuana in Canada, otherwise known as cannabis, marked the first developed country to legalize the substance at a federal level. States such as Alaska, California and Colorado have legalized the substance at a state-level, but the Trudeau government paddled into unknown waters when they legalised the use of Cannabis recreationally at a federal level. The writing has been on the wall for years about Cannabis, with a 2012 survey reporting that around 43% of Canadians had, at one point or another, used marijuana (Rotermann & Langlois, 2015). Furthermore, upwards of 53% of Canadians between the ages of 18 and 44 had tried recreational cannabis at least once (Rotermann & Langlois, 2015). Public opinion of the subject was similarly peaking favourably, with a 2018 poll showing 66% of Americans would favour the legalization of the substance, compared to just 12% half a century prior (Curry & Wilson, 2020). A combination of the previous system being quite obviously ineffective at best and public opinion on the recreational use of cannabis swinging positively around the globe, helped shape what was the perfect storm for the Liberal party to take a revolutionary step forward.

Money Talks

During his 2016 report on the legalization of marijuana, Dr Mohammed Hajizahed (2016) announced that the most appealing argument in favor of recreational marijuana being legalized was the economic value brought from the sudden increase in tax revenue to the Canadian economy. A 2016 CIBC World Markets report by Avery Shenfeld estimates that the recreational marijuana industry could net a possible ten billion dollars yearly, with the government collecting a hefty percentage of that, if marijuana is to be taxed similarly to alcohol and tobacco (as cited in Hajizahed, 2016).

Consequently, with the legalization of marijuana, the pressure put on Canada's law enforcement should be lessened. From 1998 to 2013, while the crime rate per 100 000 was steadily dropping, the number of drug-related offences were climbing at an alarming rate, going from around 200 drug offences per 100 000 to a peak of 325 in 2011 (Cotter et al, 2013). Cannabis-related offences represent a majority of these. For instance, in 2012 the rate per 100 000 for all drug-related offences excluding cannabis was 100, while cannabis-related offences sat at a staggering 225. The number of resources that the effort to combat the illegal market for cannabis requires is astounding, because even after having been arrested, there is still a long and arduous legal process, and there is still, even after that, the resources needed to fulfill the sentencing given. Twenty-seven percent of supply and sixteen percent of possession charges find the guilty in custody, and even if custody is avoided, there is still the parole officer involved in probation. The effort to combat the

black-market of marijuana is costing Canadians billions, and as the number of cannabis users grows, the problem will only compound (Cotter et al, 2013).

The legalization of marijuana is a uniquely perfect idea financially, because between the inevitable boost to the economy created by the influx of taxes on marijuana, and the lightening of the cost of maintaining the previous prohibition, the Canadian government will be profiting immensely. There is a definitive possibility for the marijuana industry to net the Canadian government near double figure billions yearly during its early years, with growth potential on par with the alcohol industry, which netted Canada around \$13 billion in 2019/2020 (*Control and sale of alcoholic beverages, year ending March 31, 2020, 2020*).

Finding An Ethical High

Legalizing marijuana has been the center of ethical debate for decades, though for most of the past century, it has been “a century of cannabis demonization” (Bowal et al, 2020). This demonization helped to shape the stigma surrounding the use of marijuana that preceded the substance’s legalization, and still hampers progress within the industry today.

Throughout the years of stigma, the black-market for marijuana had flourished, becoming a core part of Canada’s underground economy. The black-market for marijuana put power “into the hands of illegal drug dealers... with no accountability” (Hajizahed, 2016). It was a cruel and dangerous business, and the most impacted group, was young Canadians. According to a 2013 UNICEF report, 28% Canadian youths, aged between 11-15, had used marijuana within the past year, illegally. This puts Canadian youths as the highest usage percentage of any of the 29 most developed countries worldwide (as cited in Hajizahed,

2016). One of the frequent points of contention surrounding the legalization of marijuana is a belief that should cannabis become legal, it would become more readily available to our youth. The consensus amongst medical professionals and policy makers, however, is that legalization is a “*favourable alternative*” to the past approach (Lake & Ker, 2017). The approach used in the past was inadequate, making change imperative, and that change was making marijuana something that the Canadian government could control, which was the first step towards finding a better solution.

With the legalization of marijuana, the Canadian government can begin to better educate Canadian citizens on the risks of using cannabis, like how it does with tobacco products and alcoholic beverages. Cannabis’ demonization has left the populace with a tinted idea of the drug. Years of incomplete studies and exaggerated reports would make it difficult to have a good understanding of any subject, never mind a contentious subject like cannabis (Lake & Ker, 2017). By educating Canadians about cannabis, this creates a safer environment for using recreational marijuana, as it allows for cannabis users to make informed decisions; like how much is too much, or is being high and driving bad? If something is illegal, a government can’t provide information on how to use it safely, as that would be paradoxical. Therefore, cannabis needs to be legalized before the government can begin educating about the substances.

The United States of America has several individual states where marijuana has been legalized, and there has been found to be a correlation between the legalization of marijuana and a decrease in opioid-related deaths (as cited in Curry & Wilson, 2020). Canada has recently struggled with Fentanyl, a powerful opioid used commonly as pain

medication, and as an anesthetic. Though it is unproven whether the legalization and availability of marijuana is the catalyst for these differences, an estimated 25% decrease within states that had legalized marijuana for medicinal use points in that direction (Lake & Kerr, 2017).

Furthermore, around 50% of Canadian male citizens, and 35% of their female counterparts, have used marijuana at least once within their lifetime (Rotermann & Langlois, 2015). It doesn't matter whether the recreational use of marijuana is legal, or if it isn't, the fact is marijuana is being used recreationally. What does matter is minimizing any risks that citizens are exposed to when they choose to partake in the recreational use of marijuana. As Hajizahed (2016) expresses, the black market doesn't follow regulations, because quite literally, they have none. This means that anything purchased from a black-market dealer is inherently a higher risk to its user. It could be laced with something else, like Fentanyl, or it could be a higher concentration than it is labeled as. With the legalization of marijuana, the government can set strict regulation and guidelines, similarly to alcohol and tobacco, that would make it safer for recreational use. These guidelines would set ruling for how the product is grown, how each product should be labeled, and what concentration should, and should not, be sold.

[An Intoxicating Comparison](#)

Though the ethics behind the recreational use of cannabis may be a heavily contested subject, it is far from a ground-breaking argument. Marijuana is far from the first substance to be evaluated on a societal level, and it will surely be far from the last. This means that though the recreational use of marijuana may be relatively uncharted territory,

there are many possible comparisons that can provide insight into how marijuana's legalization will turn out.

Though there are many possible comparisons, there are two specifically that provide the most accurate insights. Those are the use of recreational marijuana compared to alcohol, and to a lesser extent, the use of marijuana compared to the use of tobacco products. The use of tobacco and alcohol are both deeply ingrained in culture worldwide, as they have been for centuries, with countries like Australia boasting a total of 81% of their population who actively drink (Selvanathan, 2017). Tobacco, despite a growing campaign to educate people about its long-term health risks, was as of 2000 reported to still be used by 26% of American 10th grade students, and 37% of European students (Selvanathan, 2017).

These statistics paint an interesting picture. Despite having several long-term health risks, including an increased chance of multiple cancers (i.e., lung, mouth, throat, etc.) and heart disease, tobacco is still prominent in society. Furthermore, passive smoking, more commonly known as second-hand, is a well-known issue. In spite of all this, 4.6 million Canadians over the age of 15 still are reported to have used a tobacco product of some kind within the last 30 days (*Seizing the Opportunity : the Future of Tobacco Control in Canada*, 2017).

Alcohol, however, has more subdued long-term health risks. The motto, "Everything in moderation" is quite fitting, as most of the risk concerning the use of alcohol is in correlation with the substances overuse. Long-term health issues such as liver and heart

disease have been shown to have a direct correlation to drinking irresponsible amounts for alcohol.

Compared to the use of tobacco products and drinking alcohol, the use of recreational marijuana is somewhere between the two. Marijuana can cause long-term health issues similarly to tobacco products, but the cause of the elevated risk of pulmonary diseases and cancers is attributed to the inhalation of smoked products, and not the marijuana itself (*Health Effects of Cannabis - Canada*, 2017). This is not to say that the use of cannabis is without its risks. The use of marijuana has several short- and long-term risks, similar to alcohol, including fatigue, lack of concentration, increased anxiety and possible psychotic episodes in the short-term. In the long-term, the use of marijuana can cause a loss of higher functions (Decision-making, intelligence, memory); and an increased chance of developing mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia (*Health Effects of Cannabis – Canada*, 2017).

Both young people and pregnant women have higher risk associated with the use of these substances. For pregnant users, the effects on the baby range anywhere from lighter birthweight to developing hyperactive behaviour (*Health Effects of Cannabis – Canada*, 2017). The impact on youth is similarly immense, as all three substances can have a great impact on the development of the brain. In particular, cannabis has an astounding effect on youth when used frequently, as the “THC in cannabis affects the same biological system in the brain that directs brain development” (*Health Effects of Cannabis – Canada*, 2017).

The phrase, “Don’t drink and drive” is a universal concept that applies to marijuana too. States such as Colorado and Washington, where recreational marijuana use has been

legalized, have seen an increase in marijuana-related incidents on their roads (Curry et al, 2020). This shows another possible risk with marijuana, but a risk that isn't unique, as during research, it was found that there were "statistically similar rates of both alcohol- and marijuana-related traffic fatalities" (as cited in Curry et al, 2020).

Furthermore, the increase in marijuana-related traffic incidents is to be expected. Firstly, citizens have yet to be fully educated on the risks of being high and driving, and therefore, are unaware of the dangers that it presents. Secondly, with an increase in consumption of marijuana products, it is inevitable that there will be more incidents. Statistically, if there are more people using marijuana recreationally, it follows that there will be an increase in incidents related to the substance. If 5 of 100 users were reported in marijuana-related incidents before legalization, and 50 of 1000 were reported after legalization, nothing has changed except for the number of people using marijuana.

While cannabis may have several risks involved, there are also multiple possible health benefits to the use of marijuana. The use of marijuana has been shown to have medicinal value to epileptics, as it has been proven to help control the severity and frequency of seizures (Bowal, et al, 2020). Furthermore, in the *R. v. Malmo-Levine* case, despite a ruling that "there is no free-standing constitutional right to smoke 'pot' for recreational purposes" (as cited in Bowal et al, 2020), the supreme court did state that research "supported occasional marijuana use as not harmful" (Bowal et al, 2020). Other positive uses of marijuana include reducing anxiety; acting as a relaxant; and being used to relieve pain or discomfort, especially in the those with chronic cases.

Marijuana is far from risk-free, there are several possible risks involved with the use of the substance, especially at a recreational level, but the risks that marijuana presents are far from dangerous when used responsibly. Furthermore, there is a similar set of risks when compared to the consumption of alcohol, and it is arguably safer than using tobacco products. Therefore, if our society allows, and even deems it acceptable, for people to consume products of equal, or even greater, risk, then the possible positive impacts that marijuana can have on a user's health should make it an excellent choice to legalize and enable to be used at a responsible level.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Uncharted territory is always difficult to navigate, and when the uncharted territory is filled with decades of misinformation and stigma, that difficulty suddenly becomes exponentially greater. The Trudeau government took a massive leap of faith with the legalization of recreational marijuana, but while it was a leap of faith, it wasn't without merit.

From profiting on the taxation of a possible multi billion-dollar industry, to the crippling of the black-market's economy, to the combatting of the opioid crisis, the legalization of cannabis has several immediate positive effects (as cited in Hajizahed, 2016). The use of recreational marijuana is only growing, and with that growth, comes more power into the hands of black-market dealers. By legalizing cannabis, the Canadian government has cut out the black market, effectively knee-capping their operation, creating not only a safer market for those interested in using recreational cannabis, but a safer Canada for all Canadians.

The taxes that will be collected from the sale of recreational cannabis will have an enormous impact on the Canadian economy, as that is a several billion-dollar boost to our economy, that was lost before. Those several billion dollars will be incredibly impactful, as there are endless possibilities for its use. It could be used to better prepare Canada for any future pandemics, to aid in our switch to sustainable and cleaner energy, to further our ability to aid those who need it on a global scale, or fund any of a million possible initiatives and services that are always looking for backing and support.

The reality is that recreational marijuana is being used, and by almost half the population. At this point, it does not matter whether the substance is legal, what matters is 2 in 5 Canadians have used marijuana in their lifetime, and that number is only growing (Rotermann & Langlois, 2015). The previous system was flawed and ineffective, costing Canadians economically and societally. The legalization of marijuana recreationally allows for the Canadian government to be proactive, rather than reactive, allowing them to better protect Canadians. While it may be ambitious, the legalization of recreational cannabis is a revolutionary, and necessary, step forward for not only Canada, but for the world.

Recommendations

The goal of the Canadian government in respect to the recreational use of marijuana during its early years should be twofold: to educate and to learn. There is no feasible way for the legalization of recreational marijuana to be completely perfect, because no solution ever will be. The formative years of this endeavor should be all about educating, both themselves and the average Canadian, about the risks involved with cannabis use; about where limits should be set; about how to use marijuana responsibly. The end goal should

be for recreational marijuana to be at a point where if someone wants to partake, they can make informed decisions, and know that they can use it in as safe an environment as possible.

The newfound taxes should be used to better develop the recreational marijuana system, but also to better our society. As mentioned earlier, there are multiple possibilities, but the two most prominent are using them improve our healthcare system; and to aid in our switch to more sustainable and clean energy. Both are major societal problems that need to be dealt with, and both need large amounts of funds to conquer. The taxes collected can help Canada firstly recover from this pandemic, but also then prepare for the future, as we have been shown that our previous preparations were inadequate. Healthcare is something universal, and there is always room to improve our capabilities when the subject is people's health. After all, a healthy population, makes a healthier society. Lastly, finding sustainable and green solutions for energy is a similarly high priority, both to combat the climate crisis and to avoid the inevitable depletion of our natural resources. The extra funds provided by the taxation of marijuana will help ease the transition to more sustainable solutions, especially in provinces like Alberta, where their economy is largely based on their exportation of natural resources, specifically fossil fuels.

References

Rotermann, M., & Langlois, K. (2015). Prevalence and correlates of marijuana use in Canada, 2012. *Health Reports*, 26(4), 10–15.

Hajizadeh, M. (2016). Legalizing and Regulating Marijuana in Canada: Review of Potential Economic, Social, and Health Impacts. *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, 5(8), 453–456.

Curry, P., & Wilson, W. W. (2020). LEGALIZATION OF MARIJUANA AND ITS EFFECTS: AN INTRODUCTION. *Economic Inquiry*, 58(2), 545–546. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ecin.12877>

Lake, S., & Kerr, T. (2017). The Challenges of Projecting the Public Health Impacts of Marijuana Legalization in Canada Comment on “Legalizing and Regulating Marijuana in Canada: Review of Potential Economic, Social, and Health Impacts.” *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, 6(5), 285–287. <https://doi.org/10.15171/ijhpm.2016.124>

Cotter, A., Greenland, J., & Karam, M. (2015). *Drug-related offences in Canada, 2013*. Statistics Canada.

(2021). *Control and sale of alcoholic beverages, year ending March 31, 2020*. Statistics Canada.

Bowal, P., Kisska-Schulze, K., Haigh, R., & Ng, A. (2020). Regulating Cannabis: A Comparative Exploration of Canadian Legalization. *American Business Law Journal*, 57(4), 677–733. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ablj.12175>

Childs, J. (2021). A cannabis pricing mistake from California to Canada: government can’t tax cannabis optimally. *Applied Economics Letters*, 28(9). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504851.2020.1781764>

Crépault, J.-F., Rehm, J., & Fischer, B. (2016). The Cannabis Policy Framework by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health: A proposal for a public health approach to cannabis policy in Canada. *The International Journal of Drug Policy*, 34, 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2016.04.013>

Selvanathan. (2017). *The Demand for Alcohol, Tobacco and Marijuana : International Evidence*. (First edition.). Taylor and Francis. <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/chapters/mono/10.4324/9781351147248-10/food-soft-drinks-tobacco-alcohol-marijuana-consumption-overview-saroja-selvanathan?context=ubx&refId=8e38fb46-a80b-456a-a944-e6de810b266d>

Seizing the Opportunity : the Future of Tobacco Control in Canada. Health Canada = Santé Canada, 2017. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/sc-hc/H149-5-2017-eng.pdf

“Alcohol: Balancing Risks and Benefits.” *The Nutrition Source*, 12 Nov. 2020, www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-drinks/drinks-to-consume-in-moderation/alcohol-full-story/#possible_health_benefits.

Health Effects of Cannabis - Canada. www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/documents/services/campaigns/27-16-1808-Factsheet-Health-Effects-eng

web.pdf.<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/documents/services/campaigns/27-16-1808-Factsheet-Health-Effects-eng-web.pdf>