



Ontario Public Health Association
l'Association pour la santé publique de l'Ontario
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**Presentation on Bill 174,
*Cannabis, Smoke-Free Ontario
and Road Safety Statute Law
Amendment Act, 2017*
to the
Standing Committee on Justice
of the Ontario Legislature**

November 30, 2017

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. My name is Pegeen Walsh and I am Executive Director of the Ontario Public Health Association. I'm joined today by the Co-Chairs of OPHA's Cannabis Task Group Michelle Suarly and Elena Hasheminejad.

The Ontario Public Health Association, or OPHA, is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that brings together those from the public and community health, academic, voluntary, and private sector who are committed to improving people's health. Many of our members, whether they are public health nurses like my colleagues here or from other fields, are working on the front lines to promote and improve public health in their communities.

Our Cannabis Task Group has been calling for a public health approach to the legalization of recreational cannabis to mitigate the potential harms, especially to young people. That's why we're supportive of this legislation as it reflects many of the recommendations we have been advocating for. My colleagues and I would like to speak to those aspects that are important for a public health approach and signal six areas for further consideration.

We are pleased that the bill has among its key purposes to protect public health and safety, and in particular to protect youth and restrict their access to cannabis. Provisions in the Act that are important for achieving this include:

- having a separate government-owned and controlled retail system;
- selling cannabis in a location separate from alcohol;
- restricting the use of recreational cannabis in public places, workplaces and cars;
- measures that make drug-impaired driving laws even tougher; and
- diverting youth offenders from the justice system into education and prevention programs.

However, here are six areas for further consideration.

1. **The allowance of on line sales.** We recommend against on line sales. This could increase access to youth, remove point of sale education, and create potential enforcement challenges to ensuring the product does not end up with minors. We understand that US jurisdictions that have legalized cannabis do not permit on line sales.
2. **Home cultivation:** We recommend prohibiting home cultivation and re-examining this again in the future. This would promote public health and safety and protect youth by restricting their access. In addition, proposed legislation does not have guidelines and requirements for pesticide use, mould prevention and testing for the presence of hazards.
3. **Age:** We recommend 21 as the legal age for purchase to help reduce the negative effects that early and regular cannabis use can have on cognition, behaviour and development. This would be also be in line with the recommendations of the Executive Steering Committee for Smoke-Free Ontario's Modernization.
4. **There is a lack of measures to support smoke-free multi-unit housing.** From a health equity perspective, individuals with low-income often have fewer housing options, and may be faced with second hand smoke exposure. Provisions need to be added so that landlords and property managers are permitted to restrict smoking cannabis in their units and in common spaces, as second hand smoke can travel.

5. There is not enough **public awareness about the harmful effects of cannabis**. Further research is needed to more fully understand the impact — be it on youth brain development, pregnant and breastfeeding women or other areas. We're pleased to see the Act empowers the Minister to approve education and prevention programs. We urge the Government get this underway now and we would be pleased to assist.
6. The government had announced its intention **to reinvest revenues from the sale of cannabis into activities that would protect and support public health**, especially for youth, and to promote community safety, prevention, and harm reduction. We recommend the bill include provisions for such reinvestment.

Lastly, we urge legislators to keep in mind a health equity lens and recognize the role played by the social determinants of health. Those that are most likely to be affected by the legalization of recreational cannabis may also be those that are most vulnerable and marginalized. Appropriate strategies will be needed to mitigate these impacts.

In conclusion, we are pleased to see that this legislation has at its core a public health approach and urge your committee to consider the additional measures we are recommending to further promote public health and safety. Further recommendations related to the legalization of the recreational use of cannabis can be found in our position paper: **The Public Health Implications of the Legalization of Recreational Cannabis**.

Thank you for your consideration.

About OPHA

Created in 1949, OPHA is member-based non-profit charitable organization that provides leadership on issues affecting the public's health and strengthens the impact of those who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario. This mission is achieved through a variety of means including advocating for healthy public policy, providing training, career and leadership development, capacity building, research and knowledge exchange, timely information, analysis and consultation on issues affecting community and public health and access to multi-disciplinary networks. OPHA's membership is open to all those committed to improving the health and wellbeing of Ontarians.