

Ask a Practice Advisor: Legalization of Non-Medical Cannabis in Canada



What do I need to consider now that non-medical (recreational) cannabis is legal in Canada?

As a provider, RNs should understand that legalization of cannabis does not reduce the potential harms of cannabis use. RNs should seek opportunities to learn about cannabis and provide education to patients and families on the effects of cannabis use on mental health, brain development, pregnancy, exercise, and driving, and to support a harm reduction approach. Please reference the Canadian Nurses Association's "*How to reduce the harms of non-medical cannabis use*" for ways to incorporate harm reduction methods into nursing practice.

Personally, RNs may question the implications for professional accountability when using legal non-medical cannabis. All RNs and RN(NP)s have a responsibility to assess and maintain their fitness to practice. They are professionally accountable to ensure their physical, mental and emotional capacity remains healthy to meet the standards of care and the Canadian Nurses Association 2017 *Code of Ethics*. Impairment from cannabis use is treated the same as impairment from alcohol and other substance use. Should nurses consume medical or legalized non-medical cannabis, the professional obligation to provide safe and competent care remains.

If the use of cannabis or other substances is preventing registered nurses and nurse practitioners from utilizing professional judgement to make appropriate care decisions, the individual should contact their manager and refrain from practice because of their professional responsibility to protect the public. If an individual registered nurse or nurse practitioner has concerns about their own fitness to practice, they can:

- Discuss with primary care provider
- Review employer policy
- Access employee family assistance
- Contact an SRNA Nursing Advisor

Additional resources are available at www.srna.org. Join the SRNA Online Community of Practice to share information, resources and perspectives on various topics including the nursing implications of legalizing cannabis in Saskatchewan.

SRNA Practice Advisors are also available to discuss the implications of cannabis on your nursing practice. To contact the SRNA for practice advice, please call 306-359-4200 (ask to speak to a practice advisor), or you can email us at practiceadvice@srna.org.