



Backgrounder: Legalization of Cannabis in the NWT

In April 2017, the Government of Canada introduced the proposed [*Cannabis Act*](#) and has made a public commitment to legalize cannabis by July 2018. The proposed Act would set the national framework for cannabis legalization while giving provinces and territories the authority to establish measures to control the sale and distribution, minimum age for purchase and consumption, drug-impaired driving, workplace safety, public smoking of cannabis and more.

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) is committed to having effective measures in place to protect the health and safety of our people and communities. Our approach to the legalization of cannabis is guided by the following principles:

- Restrict youth access to cannabis, and protect young people from promotion or enticements to use cannabis;
- Allow adults to possess and access regulated, quality controlled legal cannabis;
- Discourage drug-impaired driving;
- Protect workers and the public from drug-impairment in the workplace;
- Protect public health by controlling the public smoking of cannabis;
- Enhance public awareness of the health risks associated with cannabis;
- Provide a safe and secure retail regime for the adult purchase of cannabis; and
- Provide for local options to establish cannabis distribution and consumption restrictions and prohibitions.

Public engagement on the regulation of cannabis in the NWT

From July 11 to September 22, 2017, the GNWT invited NWT public and stakeholders, including community and Aboriginal governments, to provide feedback on the principles being proposed to guide the GNWT's work on the safe regulation of cannabis in the north. This process resulted in 1155 online submissions and saw strong turnouts and thoughtful discussion at the community engagements which were held in Norman Wells, Yellowknife, Fort Smith, Hay River, Behchoko, Tsiigehtchic, Fort Simpson, Fort Liard and Inuvik. The high rate of public participation in the engagement reflects the NWT's interest on this issue. Many individuals expressed their views regarding the impending legalization, made suggestions about how to regulate cannabis, and proposed ways of limiting the impact on public health and safety.



The engagement process was an important step in understanding the views and concerns of residents across the NWT and demonstrates the GNWT's continued commitment to improving opportunities for meaningful public input into government decisions.

The feedback we received from residents and stakeholders is reflected in the GNWT's [What We Heard Report](#), which was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on October 17, 2017. This feedback also informed the GNWT's *The Way Forward*, a guiding framework which sets the stage for the responsible use of cannabis in our territory and outlines what residents in the Northwest Territories can expect when cannabis becomes legal across the NWT in July 2018.

Next steps

It is expected that the GNWT legislation related to cannabis will be introduced in the February/March 2018 sitting of the 18th Legislative Assembly. This will include the new proposed *Cannabis Act* as well as a *Cannabis Smoking Control Act* and proposed amendments to the *Motor Vehicles Act*, with the potential for assent in May/June 2018.

GNWT departments with responsibilities relating to cannabis are currently working diligently to ensure that programs, policies and regulations are developed and implemented by July 2018.