

Preparing the statistical system for the legalization of cannabis

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Canada's economy, and society more generally, continue to grow and evolve. Statistics Canada strives to keep its programs up-to-date with changing trends and circumstances to ensure Canadians are well informed about current developments. This means Statistics Canada has to continuously innovate and invest in the statistical system. The prospective legalization of cannabis for non-medical purposes means Statistics Canada needs to start preparing Canada's national statistical system to capture the associated economic and social implications.

On April 13, 2017, the Government of Canada tabled the *Cannabis Act* in Parliament, Bill C-45, "to provide legal access to cannabis and to control and regulate its production, distribution and sale." If legislation is approved by Parliament the drug's new status might come into effect by mid-2018.

Health Canada first established regulations on access to cannabis for medical purposes in 2001. These regulations were substantially revised in 2014 and 2016. Non-medical cannabis has been and continues to be illegal, although unlawful transactions in cannabis for non-medical use have undoubtedly existed in Canada for a long time. These illegal transactions are not well captured by the Canadian statistical system although Statistics Canada has, on a number of occasions, surveyed Canadian households about their usage of cannabis and other illicit drugs. Statistics Canada is currently making additional efforts to estimate the market value of illegal cannabis used for recreational purposes, prior to legalization. Once cannabis is fully legalized much of the production, sale and use of the drug will move from 'underground' to 'above ground,' making it easier to measure and report.

Statistics Canada is presently preparing the statistical system to be able to gauge the impact of the transition from illegal to legal non-medical cannabis use and to shed light on the economic and social activities related to the use of cannabis thereafter. While the system of social statistics captures some information on the use of cannabis, updates will be required to more accurately measure health effects and the impact on the judicial system. Current statistical infrastructure used to more comprehensively measure use and impacts for substances such as smoking and alcohol could be adapted to do the same for cannabis. However, available economic statistics are largely silent on the role illegal drugs play in the economy. Both social and economic statistics will need to be updated to reflect the legalization of cannabis and the challenge is especially great for economic statistics. The paper "[Preparing the statistical system for the legalization of cannabis](#)" provides a summary of the work that is now under way toward these ends.

The document "[Preparing the statistical system for the legalization of cannabis](#)," part of *Latest Developments in the Canadian Economic Accounts* ([13-605-X](#)), is now available.

The [System of Macroeconomic Accounts](#) module, accessible from the *Browse by key resource* module of our website, features an up-to-date portrait of national and provincial economies and their structure.

The *Methodological Guide: Canadian System of Macroeconomic Accounts* ([13-607-X](#)) is also available.

The *User Guide: Canadian System of Macroeconomic Accounts* ([13-606-G](#)) is also available.

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