

## **Draft bill on cannabis does not adequately protect future generations, warns the Association des médecins psychiatres du Québec**

Montreal, June 5, 2017 — The Association des médecins psychiatres du Québec revealed today its position with respect to the proposed bill on the legalization of cannabis for recreative use.

*“Based on their clinical experience, psychiatrists are convinced that the draft bill is not acceptable in its current form, and will put young persons’ mental health at great risks,”* concludes Dr. Karine J. Igartua, President of AMPQ.

### **THC and lesions in the brain**

AMPQ’s Position Paper sheds light on troubling scientific observations regarding the effects of cannabis on the brain of teenagers and young adults. It points to research-based scientific proof that the human brain continues to develop until the approximate age of 25, and that the regular use of cannabis during this sensitive period of maturation of the brain carries huge risks.

According to psychiatrists, compelling data demonstrates that regular use of cannabis among young people results in deficits in areas such as attention, memory, information process speed, and intelligence; they say that brain medical imaging often shows lesions caused by THC.

### **Increase legal age to 21**

This is a well-known fact: the use of cannabis increases the risk of developing psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia. *“We know that the risk of psychosis increases by 40% among all those who used cannabis during their life, and that such use can trigger the disorder, which happens, on the average, 2.7 years earlier among users. So, to authorize the consumption of cannabis at 18 years of age is not a good idea. Increasing this age limit to at least 21 would be a better balance between the will of the government to reduce the evils generated by the illegal cannabis market, and the necessity to listen to science to protect future generations,”* said Dr. Igartua.

### **Apprehension: psychotic disorders emerging earlier**

An internal survey shows that 89% of psychiatrists worry about legalization of cannabis leading to an increase in its use among young adults legally old enough to do so, and 78% are concerned about an increase in the use of cannabis by underage persons. 77% of psychiatrists think that the legalization of cannabis will lead to an increase in the frequency of use, while 75% believe that the severity of mental symptoms associated with its use will increase, and 72% think that legalization might make symptoms of mental disorders appear earlier.

## Ten recommendations from Québec psychiatrists

The Position Paper, based on an internal survey conducted with Québec psychiatrists last May, concluded in a list of ten recommendations aiming at limiting the risks associated with the legalization of cannabis.

1. Set minimum age to buy and use cannabis at 21.
2. Determine a maximum concentration of THC of any cannabis product legally on sale in Canada.
3. Enforce the obligation to clearly indicate on packages the THC and CBD concentration.
4. Prohibit any form of publicity that would promote the use of cannabis, and use neutral packaging.
5. Prohibit home growing for non-medical uses.
6. Adopt a rigorously regulated model for the distribution of cannabis, which would promote public health objectives, and would not be tied to any concept of profit and market growth. This model should plan for:
  - A strict control of sales points, far from any educational institution, youth centres, recreational centres, and vulnerable populations.
  - The continuing education of employees to provide them with the tools enabling them to detect users who might show signs of mental disorders or addiction.
  - A reference mechanism, such as a service corridor towards specialized resources in drug addiction and in the treatment of the first psychotic episodes for users who present signs of vulnerability.
7. Develop an educational program in school curricula, starting in early high school, on the consequences of drug use.
8. Develop tools for parents to enable them to discuss with their teenager, and to detect early signs of psychosis, and know how and where to consult.
9. Deploy publicity campaigns to fight against the trivialization of the use of cannabis, and to make the product appear far less acceptable socially among young persons.
10. Ensure adequate funding for the provinces for additional resources aiming at the treatment of the effects of cannabis, such as the programs for first psychotic episodes, and those focused on the treatment of addiction.

AMPQ's [Position Paper](#) is available online.

### Association des médecins psychiatres du Québec

The Association des médecins psychiatres du Québec (AMPQ) groups together more than 1,150 psychiatrists who practice in Québec. It deals with the organization of mental health care, and with the professional work environment of psychiatrists. AMPQ's mandate also includes the promotion of the most rigorous professional and scientific standards in the practice of psychiatry. Finally, it aims at generating a better understanding of psychiatry and mental health among the public, and to foster access to psychiatric services for the whole population of the province.

-30—

**Source:** Association des médecins psychiatres du Québec

**Information:** Gabriel Dupuis  
Cell. : 514-951-7577  
gdupuis@annickmongeau.com