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Overview

- **Background**
  - Study rationale and project objectives
  - The need for perspectives on cannabis legalization from Indigenous Peoples and racialized communities

- **Study design**
  - Collection and review of policy documents, one-to-one interviews, and focus groups

- **Learning from select provinces**
  - Québec, Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia

- **Preliminary interview data and emerging themes**

- **Community recruitment ongoing**

- **Next steps**
Cannabis Legalization in Canada

- Cannabis sale and possession became illegal in Canada in 1923.
- Canada legalized cannabis on October 17, 2018 and is now the second nation globally, after Uruguay, to federally do so.
- Current evidence about public health impacts of cannabis legalization largely comes from U.S. states and may not readily transfer to Canadian contexts.
- The federal law in Canada is the Cannabis Act (and companion legislation that includes amendments to impaired driving legislation).
Division of Powers in Canada

- Canada has three levels of government – federal, provincial or territorial, and municipal – all of which have distinct leadership and responsibilities.

- The 13 provinces and territories oversee the delivery of many goods and services (e.g., health care, education) to citizens. These are very diverse regions in terms of geographies, demographics, and political and cultural histories.

- Municipal governments are enacted under the authority of the provinces and territories, and deliver services and regulate more localized aspects of daily living.
Overall Catalyst Project Objectives

1. Build research infrastructure that facilitates a robust comparative case study analysis of provincial and community planned responses to cannabis legalization in Canada.

2. Translate and disseminate findings that are usable and accessible for all research team collaborators and the wider public.

3. Establish a cross-national collaborative team on cannabis legalization that brings together the expertise of diverse researchers, service authorities/policy stakeholders, and community members, and develop expanded research funding applications.
Indigenous Perspectives

- Indigenous Peoples globally are mobilizing and (re)asserting their right to self-determination, a movement that has shaped and been reshaped by significant developments and contemporary work to reconcile relationships.

- It is essential that any research with Indigenous partners involves working towards participatory engagement during all phases of research, and understanding and applying Indigenous concepts of individual and community consent.

- Little is currently documented in the literature about how diverse Indigenous communities perceive of and are responding to cannabis legalization. This is a major gap in both knowledge and efforts to build collaboration.

- Indigenous Co-Investigators and Collaborators on the research team are facilitating community engagement in this project.
Racialized Community Perspectives

- The former approach to cannabis, and related incarceration patterns, had many negative impacts on racialized communities, such as African Canadian, South Asian, East Asian, and Latino communities.

- American, UK, and Canadian studies have shown that disproportionate policing of specific racial groups has been a direct consequence of the war on drugs and not founded upon statistical crime rates.

- The *Cannabis Act* contains several elements which may be of particular concern to racialized populations who already experience over-policing.

- Members of diverse racial groups have been actively working towards cannabis amnesty, seeking pardons for Canadians with past convictions for simple possession.

- There is much interest and activism occurring to promote greater inclusion of racialized communities in the new legal cannabis industry and economy.
Multijurisdictional Case Study Design

- Sampling from Québec, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia

- Early-phase **policy document collection, review, and synthesis**
  - To support understanding of important and changing policies and issues associated with legalization implementation in each jurisdiction.

- **One-to-one interviews**
  - To ask participants about their knowledge, experience with, and/or perceptions of legalization decision-making, public health impacts, specific regulatory system features (e.g., provincial distribution model and minimum age), community responses and involvement, and desires for knowledge exchange.

- **Focus groups**
  - Same as above in moderated discussion settings for diverse community participants.
Data Analysis

- For policy documents: abstract and title screening for content, full-text collection and review, and narrative synthesis of primarily grey literature.

- Interviews and focus groups are being audio-taped and transcribed in full and verbatim.

- Transcripts are being stored, managed, and coded with NVivo qualitative software.

- Coding is being initially informed by standard grounded theory techniques (i.e., two investigators openly coding, grouping and axial coding, development of preliminary codebook, team feedback and discussion to refine themes).
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<th>Province/Territory</th>
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<th>Public non-medical cannabis use</th>
<th>Home cultivation</th>
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Participant Overview

- Total interview participants to date = 38 (includes 4 community members who opted for an interview over a focus group)
- Total focus group participants to date = 20 (across 3 focus groups in Montréal, Toronto, and Edmonton)
- Many interviewees have a service and/or research background related to health or public health – titles include Medical Officers of Health, scientific advisors, senior advisors, director or vice president or CEO of an organization
- Others include city councilors and law enforcement officers
Québec

- Minimum age for cannabis purchase and sale – 18 years (new government proposing 21 years)
- Provincial government monopoly on distribution and sales through the Société québécoise du cannabis, a subsidiary of the Société des alcools du Québec (SAQ)
- Public non-medical cannabis consumption is prohibited in various enclosed and public spaces listed in legislation
- Zero tolerance for THC in all drivers
Québec

- The Quebec government[...] had a waiting approach[...] And I was, like, 'You should have prepared a year ago.' We [all knew] that this was coming. That was a strong, you know, promise of the Justin Trudeau government. And, it was coming. We could have started a year before, the public consultations, even without the federal law. We could have started to discuss what kind of distribution models we want to have in Quebec, and what are the issues and concerns. And they did not. They said, 'We're waiting for the federal law.' Then I was like, 'Stop crying. You just wasted a year.' (Addictions researcher, QC interview #7)

- The business goals and the public goals [of legalization] will necessarily clash[...] So we will have challenges in terms of public education, challenges in terms of harnessing the energies of everybody to protect the health of people and also deal with this tremendous push that the industry is trying to give to the product. (Expert with municipal public health, QC interview #8)
Ontario

- Minimum age for cannabis purchase and sale – 19 years
- Government-run online retail at legalization launch time through the Ontario Cannabis Retail Corp.
- Private retail stores permitted, to open by April 2019
- Public non-medical cannabis consumption allowed wherever tobacco smoking is permitted
- Zero tolerance for novice drivers and under 21
Ontario

- You know, you have a cycle of provincial elections. The timing for Ontario, I would say, was not great because we had [...] our legislation was in place even before the federal bill had cleared Senate [...] So I think from our perspective we had very little time to change the model and we had a tremendous amount of work to do. (Provincial cannabis policymaker, ON interview #5)

- I think some different community groups may argue they weren’t consulted enough. And I’d say specifically First Nations communities. Um, I think they had a complaint both on the provincial and federal level, the lack of consultation in relation to [...] the creation of the legislation at the time. (Law enforcement, ON interview #3)
Alberta

- Minimum age for cannabis purchase and sale – 18 years
- Provincial government-run online retail
- Private retailers with storefronts under supervision of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission
- Public non-medical cannabis consumption prohibited in places frequented by children, wherever tobacco smoking is prohibited, and motor vehicles; cannabis sales not co-located where alcohol, pharmaceuticals, or tobacco are sold
Alberta

- [The provincial government is] not handling [the issue of public consumption] very well. Because their consultation process on this has been predominantly[...] ’Let’s keep it away from schools. Let’s keep it away from big public events.’ People are going to use this substance wherever[...] That hasn't been considered, as far as I'm concerned, in our jurisdiction, here in this province. It's too government driven. It's too, um, industry driven. And it's not, as far as the general public's concerned, it doesn't take[...] how it's going to impact us into consideration. (Municipal Medical Officer of Health, AB interview #2)

- We had both public engagement, which was engaging with Albertans, though we didn't just limit it to Albertans. And then we also had stakeholder engagement. So, from the public engagement perspective, why I say we didn't just limit it to Albertans is because we had an online survey that many, many jurisdictions copied. Which was great. We were really happy to see that other people liked our work. (laugh) [...] we were really trying to be very open that if we were to go to a private retail system, there would be potential entrepreneurs from across the country, or from other countries, who would want to come into the market. (Provincial cannabis policymaker, AB interview #4)
British Columbia

- Minimum age for cannabis purchase and sale – 19 years
- Provincial government-run wholesale distribution model through BC Liquor Distribution Branch
- Public and private retail permitted – with private retailers operated by the recently renamed Liquor and Cannabis Regulation Branch
- Public non-medical cannabis consumption prohibited in places frequented by children (e.g., parks, playgrounds), wherever tobacco smoking is prohibited, and motor vehicles
British Columbia

- And I think that when I speak to eastern colleagues or politicians who aren’t as familiar with British Columbia, the one thing that, like, we really need other people in the policy spheres to understand because it is a thing – you know, whether you like it or disagree with it… it is a thing that needs to be taken seriously in policy circles, is the centrality of cannabis to British Columbia’s economy. It is not a joke. (President of cannabis trade organization, BC interview #2)

- One other thing about British Columbia that I would like to say is around – and really, this is sort of an intersection between provincial and federal policy – we do not have any room, in any of the legislation[…] or the regulatory framework for medical cannabis dispensaries. So we have the medical program, where you can purchase cannabis through, um, directly from a licensed producer. But we do not have the allowance, anywhere, for bricks and mortar, physical, ‘come in and get your medical cannabis and come and talk to medical cannabis experts.’[…] And that, I think, is a real loss. And hopefully, another one of the places where we’re going to see evolution and solution. (Founder of medical cannabis dispensary, BC interview #6)
Partnering with Indigenous communities offers many important learning opportunities; process is ongoing and time-intensive as there is a need to build relationships and trust.

Respecting principles for the ethical and responsible conduct of research with Indigenous Peoples (e.g., First Nations Principles of OCAP™ - ownership, control, access, and possession), we anticipate additional research ethics approvals and data sharing agreements.

Applying for greater funding to allow for more time to cultivate relationships and be able to offer more compensation for community involvement and capacity-building strategies.
Next Steps

- We will produce and disseminate the following knowledge transfer and exchange products to research participants, key government stakeholders, and other community stakeholders in each jurisdiction:
  - Peer-reviewed journal publications and provincial, national, and international conference presentations
  - User-friendly summaries, fact sheets, and other tailored/community-desired resources as identified through engagement efforts
  - Policy briefs
  - PowerPoint slides and other presentation materials (e.g., webinars)
  - Discussion forums on provincial and national networks and media

- Select materials to be translated into French.