



Factsheet

Lessons learnt from alcohol and tobacco for cannabis regulation

The introduction of legal access to cannabis for recreational purposes can draw on the experience of alcohol and tobacco control. A policy of high prices, restrictions on advertising and sales are the most appropriate measures to reduce the legal use of addictive substances, according to a study by the University of New South Wales (Australia) commissioned by the Federal Office of Public Health. Moreover, smoke-free policies and blood alcohol concentration limits are also proven measures to prevent third-party harms linked to consumption.

KEY FACTS

The most effective measures

to reduce both alcohol and
tobacco consumption are
**price/taxation
measures.**

Smoke-free legislation

ranks second in terms of
evidence of reduced
consumption and harm to others.

The
third-ranked most effective
regulation for both alcohol and
tobacco is
**curtailment (or
banning) of
advertising.**

The study examines the various **structural measures** in the field of **alcohol and tobacco** that are intended to prevent high-risk consumption of these substances, reduce harm among users, prevent underage use and protect third parties. It shows which measures **would be best suited to achieve these public health goals if cannabis were legalised**. To this end, meta-analyses and systematic reviews of the international literature published between 2012 and 2022 were analysed.

Pricing and taxation

- High product prices curb consumption and its harmful effects. They also reduce new consumption, in particular among young people. **Targeted incentive taxes** and government-set **minimum prices** are suitable for this purpose.

Advertising and promotion

- There is a strong correlation between advertising exposure and higher consumption. The most effective way to curb legal substance use is a **comprehensive ban on advertising and promotion**.
- **Plain packaging** reduces the attractiveness of the product and discourages people from starting to consume it.

Limiting availability

- **Limiting outlet density, restricting trading hours and opening days** of outlets selling addictive substances are useful measures to reduce consumption.

Consumer information and warnings

- **Warning labels** on products have proven effective to reduce consumption in the field of tobacco. The effect depends on the size, shape, colour and placement of the warnings.
- **Mandatory information on active ingredient contents** (e.g. by means of an easy-to-understand "traffic light system") has proven its worth in terms of consumer information. Information on product packaging does not necessarily lead to a change in behaviour, but to greater risk awareness.

LESSONS FROM ALCOHOL AND
TOBACCO POLICY THAT CAN
BE APPLIED TO CANNABIS

Structural prevention measures

such as price increases or reducing availability have a much higher effectiveness in reducing follow-up costs than behavioural prevention measures such as prevention campaigns.

Without effective measures for structural

prevention, harm reduction and the protection of users and third parties,

the social costs of cannabis use could increase in the event of a legalisation compared to the status quo.

Restriction of problematic product features

- Flavoured products are potentially more attractive to a younger target group. These can be restricted.
- The active ingredient content can be limited (e.g. nicotine in cigarettes) or products with higher active ingredient content can be taxed more heavily (brandy compared to beer). Lower taxation of products with lower risk consumption (e-cigarettes vs. cigarettes) is also an option.

Places for consumption/ smoke-free policies

- By limiting places for consumption, both consumption and harm to third parties can be reduced (protection from non-smokers at work and in public spaces). While there is evidence of the harmfulness of cannabis smoke in ambient air, the harmful effects of passive cannabis vaping (vaporising) have not yet been clarified. Equal treatment with smokable products is therefore indicated (precautionary principle).

Drink-Driving Countermeasures

- The introduction of a blood alcohol concentration limit and the police enforcement of this provision in conjunction with the corresponding sanctions have greatly increased road traffic safety. Whether an analogous blood concentration limit can also be established for THC is the subject of current research.

Preventing underage use

- Preventing underage use of alcohol and tobacco is primarily achieved through age limits for sales (e.g. 18 years). These measures need to be matched with compliance checking and an enforcement regime (test purchases, withdrawal of licences in case of violations).

Market structure

- There is some empirical support that a government monopoly on the sale of alcohol at the retail level is associated with less problematic public health impacts than a commercial market. At the wholesale and manufacturing level, such evidence is lacking.

N.B. Although cannabis has some unique psychoactive, health, social and production characteristics, many of the key findings from studies on effective alcohol and tobacco regulation can also be applied to the regulation of cannabis.

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