LEGALIZATION FOR RECREATIONAL PURPOSES
The federal government is committed to legalizing cannabis. Of concern to physicians is that cannabis use has been associated with cardiovascular and pulmonary illnesses, mental illness, motor vehicle accidents, cognitive impairment, and dependence, among other issues.

CANNABIS FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES
Government regulation permits the use of cannabis for medical purposes. Patients require a physician’s authorization that includes a daily dose in grams. However, there is insufficient research and evidence around clinical uses, including indications, dosages, interactions, strains, potencies, harms and benefits. Consequently, physicians should be cautious in authorizing the use of cannabis.

THE CMA’S RESPONSE

CONSULTING WITH MEMBERS AND ADVISING GOVERNMENT
The government is moving forward with legalization of cannabis for recreational use. The CMA carried out an e-Panel survey of its members as well as directly consulting with members who are experts on the subject. From this, the CMA developed 22 recommendations for the federal government’s Task Force on Marijuana Legalization and Regulation in 2016. The overarching recommendation was that the federal government take a broad public health policy approach in legalizing cannabis for non-medical purposes and that it be held accountable for achieving public health objectives.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC
A section of our website is dedicated to this subject. In response to the government’s legislation in April, we issued a news release emphasizing the need for a public health approach in legalizing cannabis and that this should include prevention and treatment for drug use and dependence.

THE CMA’S STANCE ON CANNABIS
The federal government needs to exercise caution when legalizing cannabis. It must establish public health objectives and be accountable for them. The focus should be on protecting Canadians and reducing harm because there are known health risks associated with cannabis use. Regarding the medical use of cannabis, there is insufficient evidence on risks and benefits, the proper dosage and potential interactions with other medications.

Specifically:
- Cannabis use has significant physical and mental health risks. Legalizing it won’t change that.
- There have been numerous adverse effects associated with the use of cannabis. These include mental illness, impaired driving, dependence, lower grades at school, cognitive decline and lung disease.
- The government’s focus should first and foremost be on protecting Canadians and reducing harms to health.
• Changes need to be gradual to protect against any potential harm. In addition, changes to the criminal law in connection with cannabis should be rigorously monitored and evaluated for their impact.
• Children and young adults’ brains are still developing. The minimum age for recreational cannabis use should be set at 21. Potency and quantity restrictions should be established for those under 25.
• The federal government must continue to consult with the CMA on this matter. The CMA’s more than 85,000 physicians are on the front lines and work closely with their patients.
• Public health policy and programs need to be established prior to legalization. This includes expanded mental health and addictions services and a program to collect and assess data on adverse events associated with cannabis use, like hospital admissions, emergency room visits and impaired driving.
• While we recognize that some individuals suffering from terminal illness or chronic disease may obtain relief with cannabis, we remain concerned by the limited guidance for the therapeutic use of cannabis as well as the lack of rigor in clinical evidence.
• The government should support research for the development of cannabis drugs that achieve a pharmaceutical standard. This would provide information on dosage, potency, risks and potential complications when using the products for treating terminal or chronic illnesses.