

# Cannabis for Medical Purposes

NOVEMBER  
2019





## **OVERVIEW**

- VAC began reimbursing for cannabis for medical purposes in 2007.
- With recent introductions of legislation and regulations governing cannabis, Canadians have gained more access to cannabis for medical use.
- VAC reimburses eligible Veterans up to 3 grams per day at a maximum reimbursement rate of \$8.50 per gram – this is over \$9,000 per year to support this treatment. In exceptional cases, with appropriate supporting medical documents, more than 3 grams per day may be reimbursed.
- Veterans Affairs introduced its reimbursement policy for dried cannabis, or its equivalent in fresh cannabis or cannabis oil in November 2016. With the revised *Cannabis Regulations* in October 2019, edible cannabis, cannabis extracts and cannabis topicals were added to the policy for reimbursement.



## BACKGROUND

- 2007 – One Veteran reimbursed for cannabis for medical purposes on compassionate grounds.
- With recent Health Canada legislation and regulations governing cannabis, Canadians have gained increasing access to cannabis for medical use, by removing limitations such as specific medical conditions authorized by a medical specialist.
- October 2018 – *Cannabis Act* and *Cannabis Regulations* came into effect, providing legal access to cannabis for Canadians, and controlling and regulating production, distribution and sale of cannabis for medical purposes.
- October 2019 – *Cannabis Act* amended to add three new classes – edible cannabis, cannabis extracts and cannabis topicals – to be legally sold by federal licensed sellers authorized by Health Canada, and provincial and territorial retailers. VAC now reimburses Veterans for products in these three new classes.
- All cannabis for medical purposes products must be purchased from federal licensed sellers.



## **REIMBURSEMENT POLICY**

- November 2016 – Veterans Affairs Canada implemented cannabis for medical purposes reimbursement policy that reflects:
  - Consultations (as part of spring 2016 internal review of cannabis for medical purposes reimbursements) with medical professionals, subject matter experts, federal licensed sellers and Veteran beneficiaries.
  - May 2016 Auditor General's Report recommendations to consider health and well-being of Veterans, and contain costs.



## **REIMBURSEMENT POLICY CONTINUED**

- Established a maximum 3 gram per day limit.
- Established a maximum reimbursement rate, which is currently \$8.50 per gram. Rate is reviewed regularly.
- Established an exceptional process for more than 3 grams per day when supporting documentation is provided from medical specialist with expertise in Veteran's diagnosed condition.
- Veterans who are 'palliative', or diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) only require a diagnosis from treating physician.



## CURRENT STATUS

<b>Veteran Pensioners Cannabis for Medical Purposes (RCMP Pensioners are not included)</b>		
<b>Fiscal Year (April 1 – March 31)</b>	<b>Veteran Recipients</b>	<b>Expenditures</b>
2008-09	5	\$19,000
2009-10	15	\$43,000
2010-11	23	\$63,000
2011-12	37	\$103,000
2012-13	68	\$285,000
2013-14	112	\$409,000
2014-15	628	\$5,161,000
2015-16	1,762	\$20,538,000
2016-17	4,474	\$63,703,151
2017-18	7,298	\$50,967,423
2018-19	10,466	\$74,816,978
2019-20 (to September 30)	11,415	\$42,204,482

Reimbursement requests continue to grow, year over year.

(Table provided by VAC Statistics Directorate, November 1, 2019)



## **CONSIDERATIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

- VAC is working closely with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Mental Health Commission of Canada, and Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research to better understand the benefits and harms of cannabis on the well-being of Veterans and their families.
- Following legalization of three new classes of cannabis – edible cannabis, cannabis extracts and cannabis topicals – in October 2019, it will take time for new cannabis products to be approved by Health Canada.
- It is expected that products in the new legalized classes will become available gradually, and no earlier than mid-December 2019.