



ICGP Statement on Cannabis – October 2023

Cannabis⁺ is the most commonly used drug worldwide. While evidence indicates marijuana and cannabinoids may have potential therapeutic benefits, there are notable public health and health impacts associated with its use.

This ICGP statement was produced following a request from our members and is based on the evidence considered on use, public health impact, legalisation/decriminalisation and implications for general practice and patients.

1. Drug use has profound and lasting adverse effects on individuals, families, communities, and our wider society. The ICGP advocates a multi-agency, evidence-based approach, to further develop & implement policy to address drug use in Ireland.
2. Cannabis is a dangerous drug and a serious public health concern. The ICGP discourages cannabis use, especially in high-risk populations such as youth, those with a personal or family history of mental disorder, pregnant women, and women who are breastfeeding.
3. The ICGP encourages the HSE and Department of Health to improve surveillance efforts to ensure data is available on the short- and long-term health effects of cannabis, especially emergency department visits and hospitalisations, impaired driving, workplace impairment and worker-related injury and safety, and prevalence of psychiatric and addictive disorders, including cannabis use disorder.
4. The ICGP advocates for stronger public health messaging across the entire population regarding the adverse health effects of cannabis and cannabinoid inhalation and ingestion, with an emphasis on reducing initiation and frequency of cannabis use among adolescents, especially high potency products; use among women who are pregnant or contemplating pregnancy; and avoiding cannabis-impaired driving.
5. The ICGP advocates for accessible, comprehensive, and evidence-based treatment to be provided to people with cannabis use disorder or any other cannabis induced health problem.
6. The ICGP agrees there is a need for further high-quality research into the safety and effectiveness of cannabinoid based medicinal products.
7. The ICGP is supportive of the current Government plan to utilise a referral to an adequately resourced system of health assessment for people found in possession of drugs for personal use.
8. The ICGP supports public-health based strategies, rather than incarceration, with respect to individuals possessing small quantities* of cannabis for personal use.
9. The ICGP acknowledges the current evidence in terms of the adverse impact of legalisation.
10. The ICGP encourages ongoing research on the impact of legalisation and decriminalisation of cannabis in an effort to promote public health and public safety.
11. The ICGP recognises the need for an educational resource for general practitioners on the health impacts of cannabis use. The ICGP will seek funding to develop and disseminate education for GPs.

Issued by Dr. Diarmuid Quinlan, Medical Director, ICGP; October 2023.

⁺ In this statement, cannabis is used as an overarching term to refer to the plant *Cannabis sativa*. Substances derived from the cannabis plant include marijuana, hemp, and cannabinoids.

*determination of the definition is not the remit of ICGP.