

Health Canada's response to a request for information made by the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples on February 27, 2018

Question:

Senator Lovelace Nicholas: My concern is that, in all the years I've lived in a First Nations community, the province doesn't always have the best interests of the Indigenous people. That's a big concern.

I have heard in talking to people in my community and that's exactly their concern. They don't want the province to have anything to say about cannabis or marijuana growing. Anyway, on that, I just have one more short question.

As you know, there is prescribed medical marijuana. My concern, as well as that of the people in my community, is that a lot of people can't afford to buy it. They wanted to see if there was a possibility the marijuana that people and elders on social disabilities and fixed incomes have to use could be paid for.

Ms. Valerie Gideon: At the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch we have the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program for First Nations and Inuit that covers a broad range of supplemental health benefits, including prescribed medications, so I'll respond.

We have absolutely looked at coverage of medical marijuana. The problem is that it does not have a notice of compliance and it is not a medication, so to speak, that is dispensed in that manner. It is not something that we can cover within the context of the program.

There is not strong clinical evidence with respect to medical marijuana at this stage. We do, however, cover medications that have some of the medicinal properties of medical marijuana under the program. Those are alternatives for elders or people suffering from chronic pain to consider.

We have some information about this that we could provide to the committee. We have provided it to First Nations that have inquired about why the program does not cover medical marijuana. I could certainly forward that on.

Senator Lovelace Nicholas: I would appreciate that. Thank you.

Mr. Eric Costen: I could add one point of information that may be of interest. It may be something that we might follow up with the senator about.

A number of the federally licensed producers that sell medical cannabis right now have certain compassionate pricing arrangements, as they describe them, which allow in certain circumstances for significantly reduced prices for cannabis.

It may be the sort of thing where by providing information to members of your community they may benefit from knowing precisely what those arrangements look like.

Response

Under the Access to Cannabis for Medical Purposes Regulations, the availability, pricing and variety of cannabis strains sold for medical purposes in Canada are business decisions made by each federally licensed producer.

As of September 2017, the following licensed producers offered some form of compassionate pricing program:

- ABCann
- Aurora
- Bedrocan
- Canada's Island Garden
- Canna Farms
- CanniMed
- CannTrust
- Delta 9
- Emerald Health
- Green Relief
- Mettrum
- Organigram
- Peace Naturals
- Tilray
- Tweed
- WeedMD

Please note that these programs are subject to change, and may be “capped” and at capacity. This list does NOT include any licensed producers that offer universally low pricing (as of January 2, 2018, the prices for dried marijuana range from \$4 to \$17.50 per gram; the prices for cannabis oil range from \$1.20 to \$4.67 per millilitre) or new producers recently licensed by Health Canada.