

## Huddling and Muddling: Marijuana Legalization and Intergovernmental Relations in Canada

Contemporary Policy Issues

*Jared Wesley, University of Alberta*

In legalizing marijuana, governments across Canada are undertaking one of the most intense exercises in national policymaking in the country's history. The task of legalizing marijuana is akin to setting up an entire system of alcohol production, sale, regulation, and taxation in a period of just twelve months. Only, there are only a handful of legal producers, not enough supply, no safe consumption guidelines, no tests for impairment, no international agreements, and no consensus on a host of other fundamental policy questions. The scenario begs for research to understand how policymakers are approaching the challenge amid so much ambiguity.

This is particularly true in the realm of intergovernmental relations. In April 2017, the Trudeau government confirmed its intention to legalize marijuana, setting a target date of July 1, 2018. A smooth transition to the new legal framework will require deep and expansive collaboration among governments across the country. While the federal government can legislate changes to ensure the safety and security of the country's marijuana supply (e.g., by licensing producers), provinces and territories will be required to reform policies, laws, and regulations around the distribution and sale of cannabis. This will involve everything from law enforcement to workplace safety; from manufacturing to distribution; from public education to border security. It will also involve coordinating with Indigenous governments, municipal councils, and private sector partners. Precisely how are federal/provincial/territorial policymakers coping with this challenge, in the lead-up to legalization on July 1, 2018? This paper draws on extensive interviews with key intergovernmental players in various governments across Canada to determine which tools they are using across governments, to ensure sound decision-making and effective implementation. How did governments decide which issues required interjurisdictional collaboration, for instance, and which they could 'go it alone'? And which forums and mechanisms did they employ to facilitate efficient collaboration and resolve conflicts under such tight timelines? Answers to these and other key questions will provide the empirical foundation for theoretical frameworks, best practices, and other lessons that can be applied to urgent policy dilemmas in the future.