



Media Release

May 5, 2017

Health Research Chair on Cannabis Established

Premier Brian Gallant joined representatives from St. Thomas University (STU), Shoppers Drug Mart and the New Brunswick Health Research Foundation to announce the establishment of a health research chair on cannabis at the university.

"We all want to get cannabis out of the hands of youth and get the proceeds of selling cannabis out of the hands of criminals," said Gallant. "We will first focus on keeping New Brunswickers safe by having strong regulations for production, distribution, and sale of cannabis coupled with the necessary awareness programs and enforcement. While we put all of this in place, we will also pursue the economic opportunities that cannabis can represent for the New Brunswick economy."

This health research chair is the first of its kind in Canada, and will examine the social determinants of health relative to the use of recreational and medical cannabis. The chair will provide evidence-based data and scholarly interpretation to guide the development of public policy as new regulations are implemented.

"We are about to go through a socially complex change, and we expect greater requirements for scholarly research and input on how issues related to cannabis are addressed," said Dawn Russell, president and vice-chancellor at STU. "We will need to make decisions based on the best available knowledge. Given St. Thomas University's commitment to scholarly research that addresses the most pressing issues confronting society, this initiative aligns well with our strengths."

Potential areas for research include comparative analysis between medical and recreational usage of cannabis; age-related issues; substance abuse prevention strategies; and legalization and public health strategies. The new chair is also expected to help the university educate undergraduate students about social responsibilities and social determinants of health.

Shoppers Drug Mart and the foundation, on behalf of the government, are funding the position by contributing \$1 million over five years.

"Pharmacists are trusted as medication experts, and we believe there is an important role for them to play in dispensing medical cannabis to patients as part of their drug therapy," said Jeff Leger, executive vice-president of pharmacy and health care for Loblaw and Shoppers Drug Mart. "We recognize that research in the area of medical cannabis is needed, and Shoppers Drug Mart is pleased to partner with the Government of New Brunswick and the New Brunswick Health Research Foundation to further knowledge in this area."

"The incoming legalization of cannabis is shifting the paradigm of use, whether for medical or recreational use, and we need to prepare for and understand what is coming, clearly learn what others have researched, and further study the remaining challenges," said Dr. Bruno Battistini, the foundation's president, CEO and scientific director. "There is currently very little to no research like this being done."

The university will allocate a tenured faculty position for the chair, who will also teach courses related to his or her area of expertise. A portion of the external funding may be earmarked for postgraduate students and research assistants. The funding will begin in 2017-18 and the chair is expected to be in place this coming academic year following a national search.

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The federal government has announced it intends to enact legislation to regulate the recreational use, cultivation and sale of cannabis by July 1, 2018. The provincial government has a working group examining retail-model options, a minimum purchasing age and other issues ranging from health and safety considerations to economic opportunities.

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Media Contacts

Jean-François Pelletier, corporate communications, Executive Council Office, 506-444-4718.

Alysha Elliott, communications, New Brunswick Health Research Foundation, 506-455-0471 or 506-476-5327, alysha.elliott@nbhrf.com.

Jeffrey Carleton, communications, St. Thomas University, 506-476-6398.

Tammy Smitham, communications, Loblaw Cos. Ltd. and Shoppers Drug Mart, 416-490-2892 or 416-985-9740, tsmitham@shoppersdrugmart.ca.