



# College of Community Physicians of Sri Lanka

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## **The College of Community Physicians of Sri Lanka media Release on Attempts to Legalise Cannabis in Sri Lanka**

The College of Community Physicians of Sri Lanka (CCPSL) is the apex professional body for the practice of public health in Sri Lanka. The CCPSL is responsive to the current and emerging public health challenges and see it as our duty to advocate on issues with an impact on public health.

Cannabis or marijuana is an addictive substance that leads to many negative consequences to public health. Addictions reduce productivity and wellbeing of the individuals, reduce quality of inter-human relationships, incur costs on households and health care systems and burden communities and society with direct anti-social impacts such as thefts, violence and poverty. In the recent past, tobacco and pharmaceutical industries' interests on cannabis had led to a well-funded global lobbying movement for its legalisation. As tobacco is going out of popularity, tobacco industry is searching for an alternative and many major tobacco companies have now invested on cannabis trade. For them, it's simply replacing one leaf by the other in their supply and manufacturing processes.

World Health Organization highlights cannabis' potential to be a gateway drug, which may lead to tobacco, alcohol or other illicit drug addictions in youth. Studies show that the concentration of the addictive chemical (Tetrahydrocannabinol - THC) in cannabis in the market today is as high as 30%, a drastic increase from what it used to be in the past (around 3%). Thus, the current cannabis varieties in the market have a huge potential to be addictive and cause more harm if its availability and accessibility is improved by legalisation of the trade. Just because a drug is legalised, its illegal form will not disappear from the market as evident from tobacco and alcohol trades. There is plethora of evidence of harms of its use, including addiction, psychosis, memory disorders, permanent damage to developing brains of young users, respiratory diseases, subfertility and even acute cardiovascular effects causing sudden cardiac deaths. It has also led to increased road traffic accidents in Canada and the few states of United States of America in which the drug is legalized for recreational use.

We acknowledge the use of cannabis in traditional medicine, and as currently it is legal and available for use for that purpose in Sri Lanka, we don't see a justification to change the current status quo related to cannabis legalization status in our country. Recently we have noticed increased lobbying by different individuals and parties, who openly declare that they are cannabis users. We are surprised that the policymakers are publicly accepting the arguments of individuals addicted to an illicit drug and contributing to normalise its availability in the market. In addition, we observe that these lobbyists are publicly attacking the advocates of public health who raise their voices against this movement. We condemn such personal attacks on professionals and believe that these incidents indicate the negative impact on the society if this addictive substance become more available. We sincerely hope the government will show its interest in protecting the health of the public by not supporting this detrimental movement to legalise an addictive substance in Sri Lanka.

**Dr. Nihal Abeysinghe**

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