

Municipalities call for measured pace and a local voice in legalization of marijuana

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Alberta's urban municipalities are very concerned about the apparent short timeframes for implementing the legalization of marijuana for recreational use.

AUMA was the first municipal association in Canada to take definitive action to assess the potential health and safety implications and has been working with other associations across Canada to proactively identify the importance of an integrated approach between federal, provincial and municipal governments so we can collectively ensure appropriate systems are in place to educate the public, restrict inappropriate usage, address health and safety issues and enable coordinated enforcement through RCMP and municipal law enforcement bodies.

"The speed at which government intends to move ahead puts municipalities at risk in preventing adverse impacts in our communities," says AUMA President Lisa Holmes. "Many of the health and safety impacts are complex and require collaboration between all three levels of government and time to address".

These health and safety issues span the production, distribution and consumption of marijuana. For example, municipalities have been advocating for sufficient fire and building codes to regulate the growth of marijuana, particularly in residential properties so that current and prospective property owners are protected from the adverse effects that home grow can create. As well, action needs to be taken to ensure that commercial production facilities have to pay property taxes, similar to other businesses. The sale of marijuana needs to be carefully considered to ensure it eliminates the illegal drug market while not occurring in a way that is dangerous to youth or to the community. In particular, municipalities will need to set out restrictions around where marijuana can be publically consumed.

Federal, provincial and municipal governments all play a role in traffic and workplace safety and enforcement. Municipalities want to ensure that they, and the taxpayers who fund them, are not burdened by the permitting, inspection and enforcement activities. As well, greater certainty needs to be provided on the level of consumption that causes impairment and how that level of impairment can be detected.

"Our core message to the federal government is to take a measured pace that allows provincial and municipal governments to work together to create an appropriate framework for their province. In particular, we need to ensure that the federal legislation and associated programs provide sufficient authority for municipalities to influence the sale and consumption of marijuana in their communities", says Holmes. "We have also requested that Minister Ganley include municipalities in the provincial Cannabis Secretariat that she has created to develop a framework for Alberta's implementation. We need to be engaged as we cannot fully align local bylaws until the federal and provincial regulations are appropriately set".