

The History of Cannabis Regulation

1890

Growing medical uses of cannabis

British physician John Russell Reynolds writes in *The Lancet*: 'When pure and administered carefully, [cannabis] is one of the most valuable medicines we possess.'

1894-1895

The Indian Hemp Drugs Commission Report

The report makes key recommendations including: 'Total prohibition of the cultivation of the hemp plant for narcotics and of the manufacture, sale, or use of the drugs derived from it, is neither necessary nor expedient in consideration of their ascertained effects, of the prevalence of the habit of using them, of the social and religious feeling on the subject, and of the possibility of its driving the consumers to have recourse to other stimulants or narcotics which may be more deleterious' (Volume 1, Chapter XVIII, para 740). Its recommendations were ignored by the international community.

1925

Cannabis placed under limited regime of international control

At the Second International Opium Convention, at the request of Egypt, the conference formally decides 'Indian hemp' is as addictive and dangerous as opium and should be treated accordingly.

1928

Amendment to the 1920 Dangerous Drugs Act (UK)

The amendment adds cannabis (plant material, resin and oil) to the Act's list of substances and makes possession of the drug an offence. Other European countries follow, including the Netherlands and Germany.

1937

Non-medical use of cannabis prohibited in 46 out of the then 48 US states

1937

The Marijuana Tax Act of 1937 (US)

Under the act, cannabis remains legal at a federal level, but commercial dealers are now taxed. Even minor procedural violations could result in a fine of up to \$2000 and five years imprisonment.

1961

United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs

The convention makes cannabis prohibition truly global. 154 member states have ratified the convention since it was adopted. Cannabis is included in the strictest schedule IV of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. Cannabis is prohibited for 'production, manufacture, export and import of, trade in, possession or use, except for amounts which be necessary for medical and scientific research only.'

1963-64

The structures of the two key active components of cannabis are isolated and synthesised for the first time

Cannabidiol (CBD) and Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) are isolated, and their structures established and synthesised. CBD in 1963 and THC in 1964.

1967

'The Legalise Pot Rally' in Hyde Park, London (UK)

The rally is accompanied by an advertisement in *The Times*. The campaign states: 'The law against marijuana is immoral in principle and unworkable in practice.' 65 signatories to the petition include The Beatles, Nobel Laureate Francis Crick, R.D. Laing and Graham Greene.

1971

US President Nixon declares 'War on Drugs'

President Nixon declares a 'War on Drugs', stating that drug abuse is 'public enemy number one'. To further the 'offensive' Nixon requests \$155 million in new funds bringing the total amount for the drug abuse budget to £350 million. Following this, the size and presence of federal drug control agencies dramatically increases.

1971

United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances

THC is included in the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances as part of an attempt to bring under international control psychoactive substances that had not been included in the 1961 Single Convention.

1971

Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (UK)

The new act broadly translates the UN scheduling system into UK domestic law, also creating a hierarchy of criminal penalties for different drugs nominally related to relative risks. Similar domestic legislation emerges across much of the world.

1973 - 1975

11 US states decriminalise the personal possession of cannabis

Oregon is the first US State to make the move to decriminalise the possession of cannabis in 1973. Followed by Alaska, California, Colorado and Ohio in 1975, Minnesota in 1976, Mississippi, New York and North Carolina in 1977 and Nebraska in 1978. No other state would move to decriminalise cannabis until 2001.

1976

Tolerated cannabis 'Coffee Shop' model emerges in the Netherlands

After a change in the Opium Act in 1976 adult sales of cannabis from coffee shops are tolerated under certain conditions. Paradoxically, production and supply of cannabis to the coffee shops remain illegal/unregulated.

1977

US President Jimmy Carter endorses decriminalisation of cannabis

President Carter endorses legislation to end criminal penalties for the possession of non-medical cannabis for personal use. However, Carter doesn't propose any administrative legislation and leaves it up to each individual state to decide on their laws. Federal law maintains a penalty of one year in prison, a \$5000 fine, or both, for possession of cannabis.

1986

Televised 'Just Say No' address from US President Ronald Reagan and Nancy Reagan, includes the use of cannabis

1992

US Presidential Candidate Bill Clinton admits to having used cannabis

When elected in 1993, President Clinton becomes the first US president to have admitted to the use of cannabis.

1994

Spanish public prosecutor establishes home growing of cannabis for personal use not criminalised

1995

WHO report finds cannabis less serious public health risk than alcohol and tobacco

The World Health Organisation (WHO) concludes in a report 'A Comparative Appraisal of the Health and Psychological Consequences of Alcohol, Cannabis, Nicotine and Opiate Use' that 'on existing patterns of use, cannabis poses a much less serious public health problem than is currently posed by alcohol and tobacco in Western societies.'

The Barcelona-based Asociación Ramón Santos de Estudios Sobre el Cannabis (ARSEC) wrote to the Spanish public prosecutor asking if it would be considered a crime for a group of adult users to grow cannabis. When the prosecutor responds that in principle this is not a criminal behaviour, 97 members of ARSEC each plant two cannabis plants for personal consumption. The crop is confiscated but the provincial court acquits those involved before the supreme court rules the cultivation of cannabis as dangerous. This sets a precedent for the Spanish Cannabis Social Club movement.

2004

UK Government downgrades cannabis from Class B to Class C under the Misuse of Drugs Act

The decision follows a recommendation from the Government's independent expert advisory council (ACMD).

2000

The Police Foundation Report on the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 calls for reclassification of cannabis from Class B to Class C (UK)

'Some drugs should be reclassified so that the classes provide a more accurate hierarchy of harm and commensurate sanctions. We recommend the following: Cannabis from B to C [...] The power of arrest would no longer apply to offences of possession of cannabis.'

2006

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 'World Drug Report' on Cannabis

'The world has failed to come to terms with cannabis as a drug. In some countries, cannabis use and trafficking are taken very seriously, while in others, they are virtually ignored [...] Either the gap between the letter and spirit of the Single Convention, so manifest with cannabis, needs to be bridged, or parties to the Convention need to discuss re-defining the status of cannabis.'

2009

UK Government upgrades cannabis back to Class B under the Misuse of Drugs Act

The decision is made against the advice of the Government's own expert advisory council (ACMD).

2013

Uruguay legally regulates cannabis

Uruguay passes a bill making it the first nation state in the world to legally regulate the production and supply of cannabis for non-medical use.

2012

Citizens vote to legalise cannabis in two US states

In a historic step, Colorado and Washington State become the first jurisdictions in the world to legalise and regulate the possession/use, production and adult access sales of cannabis for non-medical use.

2015

Jamaica decriminalises cannabis

Each household is permitted to grow five cannabis plants and the Rastafarian community is allowed to use cannabis in their religious practice.

2014

Three more US jurisdictions - Alaska, Oregon and Washington DC - vote to legalise non-medical cannabis

2016

US Democratic Party adopts cannabis legalisation on its

2016

Four more US states vote to legalise cannabis for non-

official policy platform

The party calls for a 'reasoned pathway to future legalization' of cannabis and for the drug to be downgraded from Schedule 1 of the Controlled Substances Act.

medical use

California, Maine, Massachusetts and Nevada vote to legalise cannabis for adult, non-medical use by ballot.

April, 2018

Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Gaston Browne apologises for cannabis prohibition

Gaston Browne is the first head of state to not only endorse the legal regulation of cannabis but also apologise for cannabis prohibition and calls for reparations for the Rastafarian community.

June, 2018

Former leader of the UK Conservative party calls for legalisation of cannabis

William Hague calls for legal regulation of cannabis, describing the current UK drug laws as 'inappropriate'.

October, 2018

The Canadian Government legally regulates cannabis for non-medical use

Canada becomes the second country after Uruguay, and the first major G7 economy to legally regulate cannabis.

October, 2018

The US states of Vermont and Michigan legalise cannabis for non-medical use

This brings the total of US legalisation states to 10, as well as the city Washington DC. Vermont is the first US state to pass cannabis reform through a legislative process rather than a ballot initiative.

November 2018

Cannabis reschedule under UK law to allow limited medical prescribing

August, 2019

Luxembourg announces plans to legally regulate cannabis

Luxembourg's health minister confirms plans to be the first European country to legally regulate non-medical cannabis. 'After decades of repressive policies, we have acknowledged that this policy does not work, that it did not meet expectations.'

May, 2019

Illinois votes to legally regulate cannabis for non-medical use

11 US states have now moved to legally regulate cannabis for non-medical adult use.

October, 2019

Mexican Supreme Court ruled prohibition of cannabis unconstitutional

Mexico's Supreme Court rules the country's prohibition of cannabis unconstitutional, stating it violates the 'fundamental right to the development of personality.' As the fifth such judgement, under Mexican law, this now means that it is binding on all judges nationally - effectively (de facto) legalising the personal use, possession, private cultivation, and sharing of cannabis among adults.

September, 2019

The Constitutional Court of South Africa rules the criminalisation of cannabis unconstitutional

The court upholds a judgement that the criminalisation of the personal use and cultivation of non-medical cannabis by adults was unconstitutional. It does not, however, affect laws governing the trade, use, or possession of cannabis in public.

December, 2019

New Zealand Government releases the draft Cannabis Legalisation and Control Bill to be voted on in a referendum in 2020

'By making the referendum questions and the initial draft Cannabis Legalisation and Control Bill available early, the intention is to encourage public awareness and discussion.'