



Guide to Choosing a Medical Cannabis Dispensary

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Introduction

With the current legal status of dispensaries in Canada resulting in an unregulated market, CAMCD has developed this list of business practices that help promote patient safety and security when accessing medical cannabis through a dispensary. The following is a list of specific cues a patient can look for when attempting to locate a dispensary operating with high ethical and professional standards. Each of these points reflects the type of standards required to become a CAMCD certified medical dispensary.

Patient Support

Despite federal and judicial recognition of the legitimacy of medical cannabis, there remains a stigma related to its use that can negatively impact the well-being of patients, and their knowledge of effective medicinal use.

What to look for:

- Does the dispensary provide contact information for advocacy and support groups related to the patient's use of medical cannabis?
- Does the dispensary provide the patient with evidence-based information regarding safe and effective use of medical cannabis?
- Does the dispensary work with patients to develop individual plans based on the patient's needs? Does it have protocols for monitoring these plans?
- Does the dispensary have protocols for monitoring those who might require specialized care and support, such as palliative patients and those with mental health or substance use conditions?
- Does the dispensary check in with individual patients at regular intervals to ensure cannabis treatment is of continuing benefit?
- Does the dispensary provide advocacy related to the patient's use of medical cannabis?
- Does the dispensary assist patients in making contact with an agency of assistance or offer a referral where appropriate?
- Does the dispensary support patients to access subsidiary health care services and community resources?

Community

A dispensary's image, portrayed through their physical appearance and their actions, impacts the community and stakeholder perceptions of the dispensary and other dispensaries across Canada. The continuing prohibition of cannabis in Canada brings additional concerns (such as the reselling of medicine), and dispensaries should have policies in place that protect the greater community, as well as the community of patients they serve.

What to look for:

- Does the dispensary avoid “loud” signage and advertising techniques that are intrusive, inappropriate and/or promote the brand name of a given dispensary group to an underage public?
- Does the dispensary provide a detailed agreement that outlines expected patient conduct in the dispensary and in the immediate neighbourhood?
- Does the dispensary encourage awareness of and respect for local community norms and expectations?
- Does the dispensary ensure all patients are aware of their rights and responsibilities, including repercussions for infractions, courses of appeal and processes for complaints?
- How does the dispensary contribute to the community beyond the provision of cannabis?
- Does the dispensary engage in education and outreach efforts to increase community understanding and acceptance of medical cannabis?
- Does the dispensary meet requirements for all applicable municipal, provincial/territorial and federal regulations?
- How is the dispensary prepared to respond to incidents that have the potential to affect the health and safety of patients, personnel and the community?
- Does the dispensary maintain a positive presence and good relations with the community and stakeholders?

Patient Rights and Privacy

Protecting the rights of patients, such as safety and confidentiality, is an integral part of providing them with high quality care.

What to look for:

- Does the dispensary have a policy clearly stating that they do not share member information without consent?
- Are the rights of patients communicated to them prior to beginning services? Are these rights available for review and clarification?
- How does the dispensary comply with accepted standards of privacy and confidentiality for health care organizations?
- How does the dispensary ensure the privacy of patient records?

Age and ID Verification

Before registering or serving a patient, CAMCD believes dispensaries should be verifying the age (19+) of all potential clients by checking at least one piece of government issued ID together with a secondary piece of photo identification.

What to look for:

- Does the dispensary have clearly stated policies around age eligibility?
- Does the dispensary accept patients who have not reached the age of majority in their province/territory without written consent from a parent or Legal Guardian?

Confirmation of Diagnosis

CAMCD certifies and supports dispensaries that provide cannabis for medical purposes only. Therefore, patients must have a diagnosis and related symptom for which cannabis has well-documented potential medical applications. Proof of diagnosis and recommendations for use may be provided by a physician or other medical practitioner that is legally permitted to prescribe medicine (herbal or pharmaceutical) and is a member of a provincial college or other licensing body that has statutory authority to regulate their profession. Besides physicians (MDs), this may include: doctors of Traditional Chinese medicine (DTCM), naturopathic doctors (NDs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) depending on the province.

What to look for:

- Does the dispensary require a doctor's stamp and/or a doctor's address and phone number?
- Will the dispensary confirm your confirmation of diagnosis by calling your doctor?

Health and Safety Bylaws

CAMCD believes dispensaries should have a high standard of cleanliness and abide by all health and building regulations set forth by local municipalities and/or provinces in which they reside. Accessibility for people with special needs should be a priority for dispensary design.

What to look for:

- Does the dispensary strive for full accessibility to its services?
- Does the dispensary have consistent hours of operation?
- Does the dispensary ensure that cannabis and cannabis products are dispensed in a clean environment?

Transparency in Dispensing

CAMCD encourages the use of transparent accounting systems and methods for weighing, serving, packaging and collecting donation fees from clients.

What to look for:

- Does the organization use a Point of Sale system?
- Do they allow customers to view the weighing of product?

Quality control

Engaging in quality control measures helps dispensaries ensure that all cannabis and cannabis products meet high standards. CAMCD recommends that dispensaries engage in strict quality control measures to assess quality and identify problems regarding raw cannabis and other cannabis products it dispenses, while clearly communicating these standards to registered patients.

What to look for:

- Does the organization clearly state their policies and practices around quality control measures?
- Does the dispensary follow food safe protocols in the production and sale of its edible and derivative products?
- Does the dispensary test for mould and contaminants?

Appendix

How do I choose a medical cannabis dispensary?

With the variety of choice available in some cities, it can be difficult to know which dispensary is right for you. CAMCD believes that medical cannabis dispensaries should meet certain standards, and be responsive to the needs of the patients they serve. To assist patients in making more informed decisions, we have created this simple list of things to consider when choosing a medical cannabis dispensary.

Does the dispensary:

- Require ID before registering or serving patients and have a clearly stated policy around age eligibility?
- Require proof of diagnosis for a medical condition that may be helped by cannabis that is signed by a medical practitioner licensed to prescribe medicine (natural or pharmaceutical)?
- Assign clients a dispensary picture ID card upon registration for easy verification, and check ID before serving them?
- Actively provide membership with information on safe and effective use of cannabis before and after the sign-up process?
- Foster a clean and safe environment?
- Avoid “loud” signage and advertising techniques that are intrusive, inappropriate and/or promote the brand name of a given dispensary group to an underage public?
- Clearly explain the legal risks associated with using their services?
- Carry a wide variety of strains and other cannabis products?

Question to ask dispensary staff:

- Does the dispensary require a doctor's stamp and/or a doctor's address and phone number? Will they be calling your doctor to confirm your confirmation of diagnosis?
- Does the dispensary have protocols for monitoring those who might require specialized care and support, such as palliative patients and those with mental health or substance use conditions?
- Does the dispensary check in with individual patients at regular intervals to ensure cannabis treatment is of continuing benefit?
- Does the dispensary provide advocacy related to the patient's use of medical cannabis?
- Does the dispensary support patients to access subsidiary health care services and community resources?
- Does the dispensary make its quality control guidelines clear and available?