



WHAT DO MENTAL HEALTH, CANNABIS AND MEDIATION ALL HAVE IN COMMON?

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According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, the economic burden of mental health problems in the workplace is \$51 billion annually. Of that figure, 40% could be attributed to loss of productivity at work. The Canadian Mental Health Association states that mental and physical health are linked, and those that experience chronic physical pain are much more likely to experience mood disorders. The stigmas that many still carry about mental illness in the workplace can lead to discrimination, harassment, and bullying.

Many people lack knowledge of the differences between the THC and CBD components of cannabis. There is a lack of understanding about the forms of cannabis (oil, powder, mist, topical, vape and smoke). Biases continue to persist that any use of cannabis impairs a person's ability to function, no matter how they've consumed it.

Cannabis as a medication and aid to health is no longer a back-alley myth. In the last few years, cannabis research has led to the development of unique health products and nutraceuticals utilizing cannabis and hemp molecules and botanical compounds to treat a variety of mental and physical health conditions.

According to the 2017 Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol, and Drugs Survey undertaken by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, 37% of those who used cannabis reported doing so for medical reasons. There is extensive research being conducted by cutting edge companies such as CanaQuest to investigate the risks and benefits of cannabis within diverse subpopulations residing in Canada. See a video at the link below for more details:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_D4wkHHbDg

With COVID-19 creating an environment of unprecedented stressors, many are seeking ways to protect their mental health, reduce stress, and maintain a healthy body-mind connection. Conflicts and barriers created by these growing mental health concerns, combined with a lack of education and understanding of how cannabis can assist both mental and physical health related issues, continues to rise in both severity and scope. It should not come as a surprise that these issues carry over into the physical and virtual workplaces that many employees presently find themselves in.

It is not uncommon to see tensions rise in a workplace about permissible medicinal cannabis use before and during work hours. Assertions of discrimination, human rights violations, and

challenges about accommodations in the workplace can ensue. The default reaction is often that employees and employers proceed to grieve the matter in a union environment or seek recourse through the Court or a human rights or workplace tribunal.

The disputants may overlook the use of mediation as an early and practical method to help resolve their problem. Unfamiliarity with mediation and stigmas that may arise about its feel-good and win-win nature can be a deterrent to those who only know the win-lose outcome that contested hearings provide.

Mediation, which is a form of alternative dispute resolution, can lead to a mutually acceptable settlement that satisfies the needs and alleviates the concerns of both employees and employers. It also has the benefits of lower costs, relative to a contested proceeding, and can produce an agreed to result that allows for relationships and a healthy work environment to be attained.

The events during the COVID-19 pandemic have taught us to embrace change, dismantle stigmas, recognize and admit to our biases, and create safe work environments through continued learning and conflict resolution. We are presented with an opportunity to apply these lessons and to confront stigmas and biases that have developed over many years that concern mental health, cannabis and alternative dispute resolution.

The team of mediators and alternative dispute resolution specialists at the Canadian Cannabis Dispute Resolution Centre are able to assist with the mediation of workplace disputes and can provide training on cannabis law, workplace and dispute resolution policy.

Visit <https://www.cannabisdispute.ca/> or contact Treena Reilkoff treenareilkoff@tlr-mediation-wfa.com

For more information on CanaQuest, visit <http://www.canaquest.com>

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