

HCPOR #: POR-17-26  
POR Registration #: POR-065-17



## Cannabis Symbol Focus Testing Executive Summary

Prepared for: Health Canada

Contract Number: HT372-174070/001/CY

Contract Award Date: December 20, 2017

Date of Delivery: January 30, 2018

Contact Information: [por-rop@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:por-rop@hc-sc.gc.ca)

*Ce sommaire est aussi disponible en français.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Earnscliffe Strategy Group (Earnscliffe) is pleased to present this report to Health Canada summarizing the results of the focus testing of cannabis symbols.

The Government of Canada has committed to legalize, strictly regulate and restrict access to cannabis. On April 13, 2017, the Government of Canada introduced Bill C-45, an Act respecting cannabis and to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Criminal Code and other Acts (the Cannabis Act) in the House of Commons. To support implementation of the proposed Act, regulations would need to be enacted in a range of areas, including the packaging and labelling of cannabis, to ensure that the risks and harms of cannabis are appropriately addressed under the legal framework.

As part of the regulations that will support the implementation of the Act, the Government of Canada is proposing that a standardized cannabis symbol be included on the package of all cannabis products. The purpose of the symbol would be to warn people that a product contains cannabis, and to prevent accidental ingestion of products containing cannabis, in particular by children and youth.

Focus group research was required to test the effectiveness of seven possible cannabis symbol concepts developed by the Government of Canada and to provide evidence to choose an appropriate symbol. Feedback from this research will help the Government of Canada introduce a standardized cannabis symbol that is understood by, and resonates with, the target audiences, particularly children and youth, and creates an awareness of the effects of using products containing cannabis and reducing the risk of accidental ingestion of products containing cannabis. The total cost to conduct this research was \$58,981.57 including HST.

To meet these objectives, Earnscliffe conducted a comprehensive wave of qualitative research. In total, there were fifteen qualitative sessions with four different segments of the Canadian population. The sessions were organized as follows:

- Six interviews (2 per city) with children between the ages of 5 and 9;
- Three triads (1 per city) with children between the ages of 10 and 12;
- Three focus groups (1 per city) with youth ages 13-17; and,
- Three focus groups (1 per city) with adults 18+.

The research took place in Toronto, ON (January 15); Vancouver, BC (January 16) and Quebec City, QC (January 16). The focus groups in Quebec City were conducted in French. The sessions ranged from 30 minutes in length to one hour.

The research explored the effectiveness of seven possible cannabis symbols as well size and colour variations of each on target audiences. More specifically, participants were asked to evaluate the clarity, credibility and appeal of each symbol. The research also tested each symbol's ability to motivate each target audience to take personal action and aimed to elicit suggestions for potential changes to ensure the symbols resonate with each audience.

*For the purposes of this report, it is important to note that qualitative research is a form of scientific, social, policy and public opinion research. Focus group and interview research is not designed to help a group reach a consensus or to make decisions, but rather to elicit the full range of ideas, attitudes, experiences and opinions of a selected*

*sample of participants on a defined topic. Because of the small numbers involved the participants cannot be expected to be thoroughly representative in a statistical sense of the larger population from which they are drawn and findings cannot reliably be generalized beyond their number.*

The key findings from the research are presented below.

- The interpretations participants made about each symbol concept were derived from the shapes, colours, and the imagery that appeared in the symbols. All of these were important factors influencing participants' impressions and understanding of the intended messages.
- The circular and triangular shapes of the symbols were easily recognized by all participants although these shapes did not necessarily imply any other meaning to all participants. **The octagonal shape was referred to as a stop sign, inferring meaning to all participants immediately.**
- Children (5-12) could identify all the shapes, but did not attach much meaning to the circle or triangle. On the other hand, some youth (13-17) and adults (18+) inferred "caution" from the triangular shape.
- **With respect to the imagery, participants (particularly children) derived a lot of meaning from the hand.** For children (5-12), it reminded them of the "don't walk" symbol at pedestrian crossings. When asked to describe what the hand inferred, children suggested "stop," "don't touch," or "don't do something".
- **The cannabis leaf was less recognizable to participants of all ages.** None of the children (5-9) recognized it. Some of the children (10-12) recognized the leaf, as did most youth (13-17) and adults (18+).
- **The acronym, THC, was the least recognizable image used in the symbols.** None of the children (5-12), some of the youth (13-17), and, many (but not all) of the adults knew what THC referred to. While, many did not understand the meaning of the acronym, the block letter font was foreboding. Interestingly, many adults, especially parents, felt that the acronym would be a good conversation starter with their children because they anticipated their children having questions about the acronym.
- On the question of size, most participants (of all ages) said that their interpretation of the symbols did not change much when provided with the larger versions. However, there was a sense that the larger versions were easier to see, particularly the versions that included the cannabis leaf (in that the jagged edges of the leaf were much more legible), that the colours popped more, and that the symbols would better capture their attention.
- In terms of colour, participants felt the red background was attention-grabbing and that it conveyed a sense of warning, caution, and danger. Reactions to the yellow background were varied. Some, mainly children (5-12), argued that it was not as noticeable or impactful; that the red background more effectively conveyed a sense of danger. Some youth (13-17) and adults (18+), compared the yellow symbols to other symbols familiar to them that denote corrosive, toxic and/or dangerous products.

Research Firm:

Earnscliffe Strategy Group Inc. (Earnscliffe)  
Contract Number: HT372-174070/001/CY

Contract award date: December 20, 2017

I hereby certify as a Representative of Earnscliffe Strategy Group that the final deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed: 

Date: January 30, 2018

Stephanie Constable  
Principal, Earnscliffe

