

# The Importance of Consumption Spaces

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Canada's federal and many provincial governments have neglected the importance of [cannabis](#) consumption spaces, according to [a case study published](#) in *Contemporary Drug Problems*.

Its authors looked at the Victoria Cannabis Buyers Club (VCBC), particularly the consumption space known as "The Box." The study found numerous benefits to a [medical cannabis smoking](#) lounge.

Benefits that have either been ignored or glossed over by policymakers and specific actors in the "public health" field.

Instead of getting praise for its community-centric cannabis model, regime enforcers [continue to target and raid](#) Canada's last remaining compassion club.

As such, VCBC's consumption lounge is no longer available after changing locations this past February.

Hopefully, this study lands on the desk of an influential bureaucrat. Because of the importance of cannabis consumption spaces go beyond convenience and health. It's about safety and the rights of patients.

## The Importance of Consumption Spaces

"[Smoking](#) remains the preferred mode of consumption for people who medicate for chronic illness or chronic symptoms," Dr. Gagnon, lead author of the study, told CLN by phone. "And so for them, having a place to smoke is incredibly important."

The case study examines how community-based cannabis clubs, like the VCBC, provide low-income individuals with a safe place to consume. Often, these people live in housing or apartments that restrict smoking.

The research suggests that cannabis consumption spaces are essential for public health, harm reduction, and wellness. Dr. Gagnon and the other authors emphasize the need for fair and inclusive approaches.

While conventional approaches consider smoking unsafe, Dr. Gagnon broadly defines safety. She says there are risks to getting evicted, "even with the approval of their physician and all their paperwork in order," a medical cannabis patient can still be left without a place to consume.

"This is the kind of safety that I also wanted to include because it's very important to people," Dr. Gagnon says.

Like the people behind the VCBC, Dr. Gagnon is less enthusiastic about [legalization](#) efforts so far. She criticizes the focus on [recreational](#) markets that have, more or less, thrown medical cannabis patients under the bus.

"All the places that people used to go to like [dispensaries](#) and compassion clubs and bars clubs, they've all been closed," she says. "So, there's been like this erasure of previously, very well established and kind of self-regulated access points with consumption spaces."

## Cannabis Smoke vs. Tobacco Smoke

Why have public health authorities ignored the importance of cannabis consumption spaces? According to Dr. Gagnon, it's because they don't like smoke.

“The moment that there is smoke involved, it's all about wanting to turn people away from smoking. But I really do think if we take a closer look from a harm reduction and public health perspective, there's some serious benefits for this population that we just can't ignore.”

VCBC founder Ted Smith agrees. The importance of cannabis consumption spaces is invaluable.

“We've got a lot of discussion happening amongst politicians and other people about it,” he told CLN. “But ultimately, the health authorities are not moving ahead in any way toward public consumption of cannabis.”

Although it's an uphill battle, Dr. Gagnon thinks we can reverse course. Harm reduction strategies are in place for safe crack smoking and safe injection.

Dr. Gagnon envisions “Best practices in terms of designing safer, inhalation spaces that are good for staff.” She points to examples in Europe and legal US states, where many jurisdictions craft legalization efforts so as not to undermine existing medical regimes.

But in Canada? Our public health authorities ignore the importance of cannabis consumption spaces. “I think this is very much ideological,” Dr. Gagnon says. “I think in their mind, they just think [tobacco](#). So they're taking that approach to cannabis.”

“I think we're now seeing the effects of that,” says Dr. Gagnon. “And this is where governments I think are really failing.”

## The Importance of Consumption Spaces

Governments don't have to choose between profitable “bourgeois” cannabis consumption lounges and important community-based medical cannabis consumption spaces.

That's the false dichotomy they're giving themselves.

While Dr. Gagnon and others worked on this paper, the B.C. government did its own internal review on consumption spaces.

The B.C. government is looking at a commercial model. A model, Dr. Gagnon says, that is for “a middle-class homeowner” instead of the poor and marginalized.

“I think is this a good example of the majority of people impacted by this very negatively and disproportionately will be tenants and people at risk of addiction people are, precariously, housed. And so this is again like a complete disconnect with who the government is kind of gearing to allow.”

Ted Smith puts it more bluntly.

“You know, I think the doctors feel really dumb for having once been endorsed tobacco. ... And now to have to admit that they were wrong about this all along as well, I think that's really hard for them.”

“The biggest hurdle we have with medical use and public consumption are these conservative doctors that are stopping us from consuming in public for own good. They somehow think the public can't think rationally, and they need all these rules and prohibitions to stop us from harming ourselves.”

Suppose we were to judge the B.C. and Canadian governments on their actions. We'd have to conclude that the importance of cannabis consumption spaces depends on who is using them.

Low-income individuals with health issues? Raid 'em, shut 'em down, label 'em criminals and send the patients to the closest pharma [dispensary](#).

Middle-class individuals with credit cards? Right this way, sir, your taxable cannabis and cannabis lounge are waiting.