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Police Raid of Medical Cannabis Dispensary Puts Patients at Risk

Yesterday, Cannabis as Living Medicine (CALM), one of the most well-established medical cannabis dispensaries in Canada, was raided by police in Toronto for the second time in five months. In the last couple of months, a dispensary in Guelph, another in Iqaluit, and several in the province of Quebec were also raided.

Canadians for Safe Access, a national patient advocacy organization, is denouncing these raids. "The result is that thousands of Canadians suffering from MS, Cancer, HIV/AIDS, arthritis and other critical and chronic illnesses have lost an important source of their medicine," laments Rielle Capler, a researcher and co-founder of the organization. "They will have to go to the streets or suffer without their medicine." Capler adds, "Rather than leave these dispensaries vulnerable to police raids, CSA is calling on Health Canada to work with them to develop regulations that would ensure their protection as well as the highest quality of care for patients. Our government should be supporting patients to access the best possible medicine, and supporting the organizations that are providing this vital service."

While the use of cannabis for medical purposes is constitutionally legal in Canada, the Federal Government's program, which provides licenses to patients for legal possession of cannabis, does not provide an adequate legal source of this medicine. Government statistics show that only about 800 of the 4000 licensed medical cannabis users access the government's supply, which is considered by many to be inferior. Research indicates that over half of license holders acquire their cannabis from dispensaries, which currently supply high quality medicine to an estimated 20,000 Canadians with critical and chronic medical conditions.

Medical cannabis dispensaries, also known as compassion clubs, have played a vital role supplying safe access to cannabis for the critically and chronically ill in Canada for over 12 years. These organizations provide access to a variety of high quality cannabis strains and preparations that can effectively alleviate pain, muscle spasms, nausea, anxiety, and other serious symptoms. Compassion clubs are also at the forefront of academic peer-reviewed research on medical cannabis in Canada. Well-run dispensaries are appreciated by patients, accepted within communities, and their work has been lauded by various court rooms across the country.

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