

PRESS RELEASE

Canada's Legal Cannabis Industry Lacks Diversity, A New Policy Brief by the Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation and the University of Toronto Finds

Toronto, Canada (October 14, 2020) – A [policy brief](#) released today by the Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation and the University of Toronto that examines race and gender of executives and directors in the Canadian cannabis industry found that Black and Indigenous people, and women, are underrepresented in leadership positions across the board.

The new policy brief found cannabis industry leaders are primarily White (84%) and men (86%). Non-White industry leaders are in the minority (6% South Asian, 3% East and Southeast Asian, 2% Indigenous, 2% Arab, 1% Black, and 1% Latinx).

This research examined the race and gender of all c-suite level executives and boards of directors of licensed cannabis producers and their parent companies operating in Canada. Offering a snapshot of the legal cannabis industry, the analysis includes 700 executives and directors across 222 organizations (166 licensed producers and 56 parent companies).

“As Canada approaches the two-year anniversary of nationally regulating recreational cannabis production and sales, this analysis shows that much work remains to achieve a diverse legal cannabis industry,” said Dr. Akwasi Owusu-Bempah, Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Toronto and senior author of the policy brief. “While this does not suggest that legalization has failed,” he continued, “it emphasizes the need for cannabis policy to evolve to meet the moment. Only then can we begin rectifying the injustices experienced by racialized groups disproportionately targeted and punished under cannabis prohibition.”

Given the disproportionate negative impact that cannabis prohibition had on Black and Indigenous people in Canada, legalization was heralded as an opportunity to rectify the injustices experienced under prohibition. This research project offers a first-of-its-kind comprehensive and systematic look at the race and gender of those with the greatest influence and financial stake in the legal cannabis industry in Canada.

“Two years in, Canada’s federal and provincial governments are currently in the midst of a formal internal review of their cannabis regulation frameworks,” highlighted Annamaria Enenajor, Executive Director of [Campaign for Cannabis Amnesty](#), who was not involved in the research project. “This is the time to take clear policy action to ensure the adequate representation of women, as well as Black and Indigenous people, in the legal cannabis industry in Canada.”

Several recommendations are made in the policy brief to structurally address the underrepresentation of racialized groups and women:

- First, social equity programs like those instituted in California, Massachusetts, and Illinois could be adopted to provide targeted avenues of entry into the cannabis industry for underrepresented groups.
- Second, tax revenue from cannabis sales can be used to support financial business development programs aimed at lowering barriers to entry.
- Beyond government regulation, the policy brief calls on private actors to adopt strategies to diversify their executives and directors.

About the Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation

The [Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation](#) (CDPE) strives to improve community health and safety by conducting research and outreach on best practices in drug policy. We work collaboratively with governments, affected communities, and civil society to guide effective and evidence-based policy responses to substance use. The CDPE was founded as the International Centre for Science in Drug Policy (ICSDP) in 2010 at the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS in Vancouver, Canada.

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