

Background

- Increasing global attention to legalising non-medical cannabis¹, including recent Aus inquiries^{2,3}
- Legalisation can take a myriad of legal shapes and there is no single agreed upon model for legalising cannabis. Several helpful diagrams of the “regulatory spectrum” of models exist (e.g. ^{4, 5}) but the options canvassed thinly.
- A survey of terms used to discuss and design cannabis regulatory models therefore warranted.

Aims and method

To review the language and terms used to describe regulatory models and options.

Reviewed peer-reviewed and grey literature on cannabis regulation and legalisation.

Findings

Terminology not settled

There are inconsistencies in terminology used to describe regulatory models, and the terms used often lack specificity.

Common terms used to describe options include:

“Public sector”

- Often equated with the state, but could also mean ‘community-ownership’ where a not-for-profit structure was assumed but not specified.

“Monopoly”

- Who controls a monopoly and to what degree not often specified eg. state or private entity
- Whether a monopoly exists at production or distribution rarely mentioned.

“Commercial”

- Extreme or end point of most “regulatory spectrum” diagrams
- Equated with the common approach to alcohol - masks lots of variation
- Frequently referred to as something to be avoided or contained

“Private sector”

- Used to distinguish approach from state control, even in the case of not-for-profit control (examples above).
- Little discussion of not-for-profit ownership as not private

“the standard commercial model”⁶
“restrained commercial market”⁷

In Germany: ‘privately-run clubs ... legally required to operate on a non-profit basis’⁸
‘In Switzerland the law states state cannabis ‘pilot studies conducted by authorised private sector entities’⁹

Supply chain rarely specified

- Supply chain comprises production, distribution and supply. Literature often focuses on who controls the final stage - supply - without discussing organisation and control of production and distribution
- Ownership and control of each stage of supply chain can vary Eg. Quebec, Canada has state monopoly for distribution and retail and licenses private production



Production



Distribution



Supply

Market composition unexamined

- Hybrid models common eg. most Canadian Provinces/Territories have a mix of both state- and privately-run cannabis retail outlets¹⁰
- Competition between market segments likely shape other variables that influence population-level consumption



Who	State, non-state
Degree	Exclusively, partially etc

Variables other than regulatory model likely key

Regulatory models alone are not the sole influence on variables that shape supply. Government regulation and law, irrespective of whether retail is licensed to private operators of state-run, will shape supply.

Government Rules and Regulations

- Minimum Purchase Age
- Packaging and Labeling Restrictions
- Hours of Operation
- Density and location of outlets
- Price
- Promotion, Marketing and advertising

Legal aspects

- Objects of Law
- Law Enforcement

Discussion and Conclusion

Current literature lacks detailed terminology for cannabis regulatory models. Broad classifications are often linked to population use, but rarely account for how models shape supply dynamics—factors that likely influence consumption. Regulatory choices are also oversimplified, ignoring the complexity of real-world markets.

Clear, consistent descriptions of cannabis market options are essential. More precise language can improve public and political debate, and support better policy design by reflecting the true complexity of cannabis regulation.

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