

Medical cannabis in Canada – What a Trip! The hazy road to cannabis legalization

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BACKGROUND

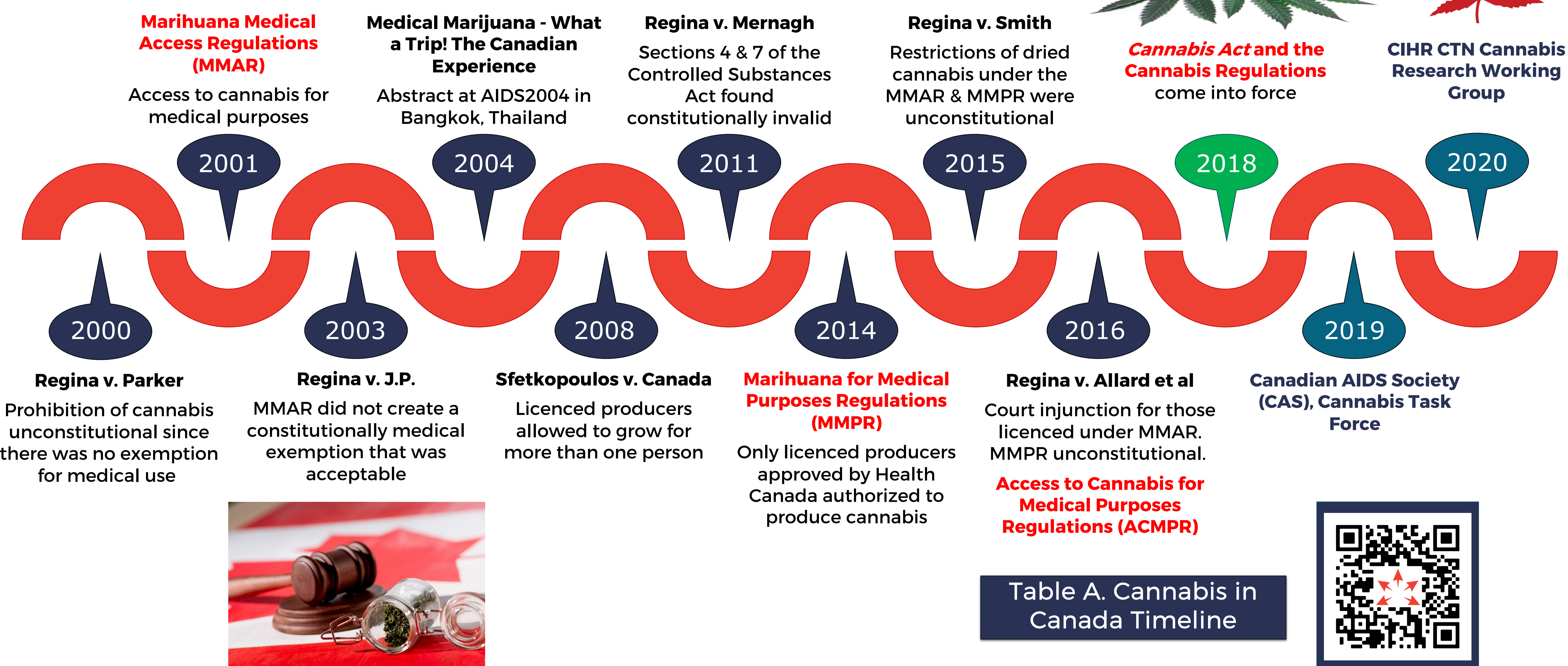
In October 2018, Canada legalized recreational cannabis. The new regulations superseded previous medical cannabis regulations, leaving medical cannabis patients fighting for access rights that were won in 2001. At AIDS2004 in Thailand, we described the long road to the Marihuana Medical Access Regulations (2001). Access to medical cannabis was achieved on the basis that laws were unconstitutional, by violating the life, liberty, and security interests of persons under the Canadian Charter for Rights and Freedoms. The long-fought battles for access to medical cannabis also helped pave the road to the *Cannabis Act*, a legal and regulatory framework for recreational cannabis, and the introduction of government excise tax.

DESCRIPTION

(Table A) Cannabis in Canada Timeline outlines numerous times that medical cannabis patients and advocates intervened, challenged, and succeeded in maintaining a medical cannabis access program in Canada.

With the new cannabis regulatory framework and the commercialization of recreational cannabis, clinical research on the risks and benefits of cannabis is critical in informing evidence-based cannabis health policy and ensuring the continuation of a medical cannabis access program.

Cannabis in Canada – Timeline



LESSONS & SUCCESSES

The Canadian AIDS Society (CAS) Cannabis Taskforce (2019) and the CIHR CTN Cannabis Research Working Group (2020), were formed to conduct cannabis research and develop evidence-based clinical practice guidelines, to inform cannabis health policy that will enable patients to continue to access to medical cannabis, with a special focus on affordability including private and public insurance coverage.

CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

The last 20+ years of medical cannabis in Canada have led towards the hazy road of legalization. Medical cannabis patients and advocates have temporarily succeeded in preserving a medical cannabis program in Canada alongside the legalization.

Cannabis researchers and patient advocates have until 2025, to provide clinical evidence on the risks and benefits of cannabis, to inform health policies that will preserve a medical cannabis access program in Canada.