

THE POT THICKENS

In most of Atlantic Canada, provincial governments will be selling recreational cannabis. Is that a good thing?

The lure of additional revenue was too great to resist for three of the four provincial governments in Atlantic Canada when it came to deciding who will sell recreational pot when it becomes legal in July 2018. Going with the public retail model could be a boon for government coffers, but should they have left it in the hands of the private sector?

The three provinces that chose the public retail model (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and P.E.I.) say they went that route after receiving advice from other jurisdictions and stakeholders, and because that's what the majority of people and organizations they consulted wanted. Here is a snapshot of how recreational cannabis will be sold in the region.

New Brunswick

In October 2017 Brian Gallant's government announced NB Liquor will operate recreational cannabis retail operations through its subsidiary CannabisNB. The outlets will be stand-alone stores. There will be 20 of them in 15 communities. Online sales will be available to ensure distribution and accessibility throughout the province. The government says more retail locations may be opened based upon demand and market capacity. As for why the government decided to get into the pot selling business, finance minister Cathy Rogers said in October it was partly based on listening to what other places did. "Advice we have heard from other jurisdictions that have legalized cannabis, like Colorado and Washington, is to start with tight government oversight."

Nova Scotia

The distribution and sale of cannabis In Canada's ocean playground will be through the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission. It will be sold at nine existing NSLC stores and online. The government says staff will be trained to help customers make "informed, responsible choices." Cannabis will be sold in a separate area in NSLC stores, and cannabis products will not be visible to people in the rest of the store. Nor will anyone under 19 be permitted where it's sold. Why is the NSLC the right choice to sell cannabis? The government says during consultations, stakeholders were "overwhelmingly" in favour of the public distribution and retail model. "They told us that the NSLC allows Nova Scotia to best protect children and youth, and that it made sense to use a Crown corporation that already has retail experience and infrastructure."

Prince Edward Island

The P.E.I. Liquor Commission will be the retail distributor for cannabis products on the island. They will be sold at four government-owned retail locations and online. The provincial government says the online sales will be next-day, direct-to-home delivery. The four store locations will be Charlottetown, Summerside, Montague and West Prince. They were chosen based on population density and will allow the province to gauge sales in different parts of the province, and plan for expansion in the future if it's needed. The government listed several reasons for using a public retail model, including the belief that the Commission can ensure "safe and responsible retailing in early legalization" and that it "has experience, infrastructure and legislative authority that can be leveraged for effective distribution and security of cannabis."

Newfoundland and Labrador

The easternmost province is the outlier in Atlantic Canada as its government will sell cannabis through private retailers. But the Newfoundland and Labrador Liquor Corporation will still play a large role in the budding cannabis sector. It will control the possession, sale and delivery of cannabis and will issue licences for these purposes. In some cases the Corporation will sell cannabis products where there are no alternatives in that area. It will also set prices of cannabis and products can be bought online. A request for proposals for retail stores will be issued by the government, but it is unclear how many stores there will be. The province said its decision to use the private sector to sell pot came after "considerable public consultation", and it had looked at what other jurisdictions were doing and spoke to many community groups, health professionals and business organizations.

