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Switzerland Has ‘Laid The Groundwork For Its Medical Cannabis Industry To Flourish’ And Could Soon Be Exporting ‘Very High-Quality Flower’

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EUROPE's inaugural THC recreational cannabis trial, due to launch this week, is set to be delayed by 'weeks or a few months'.

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LAST week Switzerland became the latest in a string of European countries to [relax its restrictive access](#) to medical cannabis for both patients and businesses.

Although the country has one of the oldest medical cannabis schemes and most developed CBD industries, patient numbers appear to have been in decline for nearly half a decade, as barriers to access and costs remained high.

Now as part of a revision of Swiss narcotics legislation, access for patients has been dramatically streamlined, laying the 'groundwork for the Swiss medical cannabis industry to flourish without being blocked by additional licensing before patients can get their products'.

With the country's flourishing CBD industry poised to take advantage of its newfound ability to cultivate and export medical cannabis, and a number of recreational trials due to commence imminently, Switzerland could be on its way to establishing itself as a leading force in the European cannabis industry.

What Has Changed?

On August 1, 2022, cannabis for medical purposes, classed as containing more than 1% THC, was reclassified from a 'prohibited narcotic' to a 'controlled substance'.

As part of Switzerland's [Federal Act on Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances](#), first passed in 1951, 'narcotics containing an effective concentration of cannabinoids' shared a classification with LSD and opium.

This meant that officially the cultivation, importation, production and use of cannabis could only be authorised by the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH), for 'scientific research, the development of medicinal products or for restricted medical use'.

For patients, this meant that while access to medical cannabis was available, they were required to apply to the government for an exceptional licence.

Not only did this require them to overcome significant bureaucratic hurdles, but, as very few cases were covered by medical insurance, patients were also required to fund the application and price of the product themselves.

This issue was exacerbated by a limited diversity of available products, meaning only extracts, generally more expensive than flower, were accessible.

According to the latest figures from [Prohibition Partners](#), these factors have seen patient numbers struggle to grow since 2017.

On July 22, the [Federal Council decided to remove medical cannabis](#) from the list of prohibited narcotics, citing 'increasing demand for such permits'.

In a recent statement, the FOPH said: "This is administratively complex, delays treatment and no longer corresponds to the exceptional character provided for by the Narcotics Act."

Streamlining Access for Patients

Following the changes made at the start of the month, patients no longer have to apply to the government for a permit for medical cannabis of any kind, including plants, extracts, resins, oils and tinctures.

Now any physician, given they have the correct operating licence, will be able to prescribe medical cannabis.

While medical cannabis will still not be covered by mandatory health insurance, this legislative amendment has significantly reduced the time, cost and effort needed to access medical cannabis, with those who have 'severe chronic pain and spasticity' expected to benefit the most.

Susanne Caspar, CEO of Swiss botanical extraction company [Linnea SA](#), told *BusinessCann* that this will make it 'easier for patients to have access to medical cannabis, easier for doctors to prescribe and easier for pharmacies to distribute'.

She added that alongside significantly improving the situation for patients, this change in law will enable the 'entire supply chain to have a smoother and easier process for working together'.

'Through Full Transparency' Modern Technology Can Make A Lot Of Today's Regulatory Standards Obsolete

Luc Richner, CEO of Swiss compliance software and supply chain management platform [Cannavigia](#), took this further, stating that removing these roadblocks had laid the groundwork, enabling the medical cannabis industry to 'flourish'.

"Based on this groundwork we expect great dynamics in the industry and with the currently-being-developed educational programmes behind it, we believe that there will be many doctors prescribing cannabis in the near future."

Cultivation & Exportation

Another core aspect of the change in legislation is the establishment of a legal basis for medical cannabis to be imported and exported for commercial purposes for the first time.

Furthermore, legislation has seen a significant simplification of the approval of medical cannabis cultivation, with the introduction of a two-stage procedure.

Mr Richner believed the combination of these factors could see the country's well-developed CBD industry quickly capitalise on these new opportunities.

"Switzerland has always been an export nation. We have a lot of high-profile cultivations in the country that were built during the CBD boom with the focus on being ready for what is to come.

"Once all those facilities are fully licensed for medical, as of the new laws, there will be very high-quality flower coming out of Switzerland ready to hit the global market."

Further Liberalisation

Alongside moves to open up the country's medical cannabis industry, Switzerland is poised to launch both a recreational pilot project in partnership with the University of Basel and another Zuri Can medical cannabis research study, suggesting further evidence-based liberalisation could be on the way.

Mr Richner continued: "As official track-and-trace partner of the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) we are in the process of finalising the dispensing system for the pilot project in Basel. In fall 2022, the first flower should go over the counter, which we are excited about.

"Liberalisation is a big word, but we see that the perception of the plant in the population is changing a lot and that this will have a positive influence on the laws soon. The pilot trials provide a sound scientific basis for possible decisions on how legalisation can be done in the near future.

"Switzerland chose to go a path looking for an evidence-based legal framework that allows all stakeholders to be considered and therefore will be the most sustainable model in the market. It is not the fastest but the most efficient way to find a model that works instead of blindly copying systems from other countries."