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'If anything there's probably more drug dealers now': Pot dealer sees boost in sales after legalization



A flowering cannabis plant is seen at Blissco Cannabis Corp. in Langley, B.C. Tuesday, Oct. 9, 2018. THE CANADIAN PRESS Jonathan Hayward

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A Saskatoon drug dealer says her sales have increased since marijuana became legal in Canada.

"One of my mom's friends has cancer and she now gets [weed] from me because when she had gone to the store to get her stuff, she wasn't able to afford it," the drug dealer told CTV News in an exclusive interview. CTV granted the dealer anonymity.

"People that can't afford (legal) prices come to me."

On top of the high price tag, legal marijuana has low THC - the psychoactive ingredient that gets you high - compared to cannabis bought on the street, the pot dealer said.

"I think 20 per cent is the highest I've ever seen (in the store) and that was \$28 a gram - where I can get 30 per cent THC and it would be \$10 a gram," she said.

'All of those are issues'

A recent report from Scotiabank analysts found the black market isn't going anywhere anytime soon and it will control 71 per cent of cannabis sales in Canada this year.

Jerome Konecni, a researcher at the University of Saskatchewan, said he doesn't find that surprising.

"We knew there was around, according to Stats Canada, five to seven million Canadians who were purchasing marijuana on a regular basis before legalization. If you look at that and say, 'ok, what's going to cause people to change suppliers,' well, it would be better value, better price, more accessible. And all of those are issues," Konecni said.

In Saskatoon only three of the seven retailers permitted in the city have opened their doors to the public since Oct. 18, which Konecni said is a reason many people are still buying from the black market.

"Accessibility is an issue. Would someone drive three hours to buy a legal product when they have a supplier who is much more convenient?"

Low cannabis sales in Saskatchewan

Cannabis sales were lower in Saskatchewan compared to other provinces, according to a report by Statistics Canada.

Between October to December of 2018, the province sold \$2.5 million worth of cannabis. Prince Edward Island, with a population of about 150,000, had \$3.4 million in sales.

Konecni cites supply chain issues, lack of inventory, and processing constraints for the low sales.

"All of those things took longer than expected. As a result we have very minimal sales, especially in Saskatchewan."

Many retailers in the province had to postpone opening because there wasn't enough supply to open on legalization day. One of those stores was The Pot Shack in Saskatoon, which opened more than a month after Oct. 18.

"Suppliers weren't quite ready for recreational cannabis stores to open," owner Geoff Conn said. "When you walk in, you think you can buy whatever you can to start your store, that wasn't the case."

Since the retailer's grand opening on Nov. 27, Conn said it's been a "pretty good ride so far."

"We're getting customers and we're paying our bills and our customers are happy with the product," he said.

Beating the black market

Trying to overcome the black market is like "beating a dead horse," Conn said.

The black market will always exist but he doesn't worry about it, he said. Legal pot shops sell clean, laboratory tested cannabis, something the black market can't control, he said.

However, the drug dealer said people on the street know the drug better than the government.

"It's a lot different when you hear it from someone that smokes it all the time," she said.

She doesn't think legalizing marijuana changed any illicit dealers sales; because of legalization more people are less afraid of getting caught with the drug and are willing to try it, she said.

"If anything there's probably more pot dealers now."

To date, 21 legal pot shops have opened in the province with more opening in the coming weeks, according to the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority, but the drug dealer said she isn't concerned about the future of her side hustle.

"Every pot dealer is still a pot dealer."