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## MEETING OF TECHNICAL EXPERTS ON PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSES TO PUBLIC HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH CANNABIS USE AND CANNABIS USE DISORDERS

VENUE: SALLE B, WHO HEADQUARTERS, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

DATES: 18-20 DECEMBER 2019

### Scope and purpose

Cannabis is one of the most commonly used psychoactive substances throughout the world. Globally, in 2017 an estimated 188 million people used cannabis (UNODC, 2019). In some jurisdictions cannabis and cannabis-based preparations are legalized for use for medical purposes, and a few jurisdictions have legalized non-medical or “recreational” use of cannabis. There is evidence of increasing demand for treatment for cannabis use disorders in a number of jurisdictions, and this demand is largely observed among young people.

In 1995 WHO convened an expert meeting on cannabis that led to the development of the report on the health consequences of cannabis use and recommendations for future research in this area (WHO, 1997). Since that time there have been significant advances in research and new data has accumulated on the effects of cannabis use on health. In 2015 the World Health Organization, through its Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, organized a scientific expert meeting to review and summarize the available knowledge on the effects of cannabis use and cannabis use disorders on health and psychosocial functioning. The outcomes of the meeting were integrated in WHO publication “The health and social effects of nonmedical cannabis use” (WHO, 2016).

Since 2015 significant developments have taken place in the use of cannabis and cannabinoids around the world associated with a significant increase in number of implemented research projects and scientific publications on the epidemiology of cannabis use, its health consequences and feasibility and effectiveness of different policy options to reduce the health and social burden attributable to cannabis use. Increasing numbers of countries are considering the domestic production and distribution of cannabis-based products, and there is a growing demand for information to inform public health strategies and interventions to reduce public health risks associated with cannabis use. WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence at its 41<sup>st</sup> session considered cannabis and cannabis-related substances and made recommendations with regard to their level of international control (WHO, 2019).

This meeting is convened by the WHO Department of Mental Health and Substance Use, in collaboration with other relevant WHO programs, with the aim to reviewing the latest available information on public health dimensions of cannabis use in order to update and revise the above-mentioned publication (WHO, 2016) to reflect recent developments and accumulated evidence on appropriate public health responses. Although the overview of the use of cannabinoids for medical purposes as well as the overview of public health policies and regulations to minimise public health risks associated with the use of cannabinoids are included in the agenda of the meeting, producing any recommendations for these areas is beyond the scope of this meeting. The main questions formulated for the meeting are as follows: (a) what do we know? (b) what are the areas which require further research?

Specific objectives of the meeting include presentation and discussion of the available information, including from low and middle-income countries, on the following issues:

- Terminology, classification and neurobiology of cannabis and cannabinoids
- Epidemiology of cannabis use, cannabis use disorders and associated health conditions

- Medical use of cannabis and cannabinoids and its implications for prevention policies and programs
- Public health strategies and interventions to reduce public health risks associated with cannabis use and cannabis use disorders
- Priority areas for international collaboration
- Priority areas for future research.