


Letter to the Editor



Tobacco Industry and Cannabis: A New Public Health Challenge for Türkiye

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DEAR EDITOR,

As is well known, the “Regulation on Cannabis Cultivation and Control” was published in the Official Gazette on January 31, 2026.¹ However, it has long been recognized that the tobacco industry has had a close interest in cannabis production since the early 1970s. Companies have viewed inhalable or smokable cannabis products both as a threat to conventional cigarettes and as an opportunity to develop new products.² By the 2000s, tobacco companies began to engage more closely with cannabis producers, investing in them and even acquiring these companies outright.³⁻⁷ To date, the largest investments in the cannabis sector have been made by British American Tobacco (BAT) and Philip Morris International (PMI). The companies’ regarding cannabis use are as follows: BAT focuses on both recreational and medical use; PMI focuses on medical and wellness products; Altria focuses on recreational use; and Imperial Brands focuses on medical cannabis. BAT, which acquired TEKEL in Türkiye in 2008, demonstrates exceptionally high production capacity and activity in the cannabis sector and is actively pursuing production across a broad geographic area, with a particular emphasis on the European market.

The fundamental motivations behind tobacco companies’ investments in cannabis production and/or acquisitions of cannabis companies include the global decline in the volume of traditional tobacco products such as cigarettes, the synergies created by the similar infrastructure of tobacco and cannabis companies, the frequent co-use of tobacco and cannabis, and the desire of tobacco companies to portray themselves as “responsible” and “public health-conscious” entities.

Today, tobacco companies are implementing policies involving executive appointments, capital investments, and product diversification in relation to cannabis-producing companies.^{3,8,9} The objectives of the tobacco industry’s integration model with cannabis companies are to offset corporate losses caused by declining cigarette use worldwide, achieve high profit margins through research and development, and convert technological patents developed for cannabis consumption into economic gains.

The tobacco industry is currently shifting from producing traditional tobacco products, such as cigarettes and cigars, to newer products, including electronic cigarettes, heated tobacco products, oral nicotine products, and nicotine pouches. Cannabis consumption products will soon be added to this portfolio. Contract farming to secure a reliable raw material supply, the rapid adaptability of cigarette machines to cannabis production, and biosynthetic production of non-plant-derived cannabis will increase the profit margins of tobacco companies, which are currently declining. Restrictions on

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cannabis production and use are being liberalized worldwide, often under the pretext of “medicinal cannabis use,” thereby preparing the ground for tobacco companies’ future new products. However, it is known that cannabis use disorder exists in 29% of individuals using cannabis for medicinal purposes; as of 2023, the global prevalence of cannabis use among the 15–64 age group was 4.6%, while it was 8.4% in Europe and 17.4% in North America.¹⁰⁻¹² In regions of the Americas where non-medicinal cannabis use is legal, particularly among young adults, the use of high-tetrahydrocannabinol cannabis has been associated with increased hospital admissions, psychiatric disorders, and suicide attempts.¹¹

Preventing addiction is easier and more humane than controlling or treating it. Although cannabis use in Türkiye has increased in recent years, it has not yet become as widespread as the use of cigarettes or other tobacco products. However, the alliance between tobacco and cannabis companies poses the danger of turning Türkiye into a country similar to those in North America, where cannabis use has become widespread and may become even more common in the near future. Physicians and public health advocates must take a stand in defense of the right to health by recognizing this new face of addiction.

Footnotes

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