



Medical Cannabis Export Compliance Guide

Understanding the Compliance Pathways for Regulated International Markets

Medical cannabis markets continue to evolve, bringing new opportunities and increasingly complex compliance expectations.

This guide provides a practical overview of the key compliance pathways used by producers seeking access to regulated international markets.

Compliance is becoming a prerequisite for international market access

Medical cannabis is unlike most agricultural commodities. As a product intended for medicinal use, it is subject to increasing expectations around quality, traceability and operational control throughout the supply chain.

While regulatory requirements vary between countries, producers supplying regulated markets are increasingly expected to demonstrate that their cultivation, harvesting and post-harvest activities follow recognized good practices. Independent verification helps provide confidence to manufacturers, importers and regulatory authorities that these expectations are being met.

Understanding the different compliance pathways is an important first step for organizations preparing to enter or expand within regulated international markets.



There is no single **global standard** for **medical cannabis**

Unlike many internationally traded products, medical cannabis is regulated through a combination of national legislation, pharmaceutical requirements and internationally recognized guidance. As a result, compliance expectations vary depending on where a product is cultivated, processed and ultimately supplied.

While many countries share common principles around quality, traceability and patient safety, the specific compliance pathway often depends on the target market and the role of the producer within the supply chain.

Understanding these differences is essential when preparing for international trade.

Typical Market Expectations

European Union

Medical cannabis supplied to the European pharmaceutical market is generally expected to follow Good Agricultural and Collection Practice (GACP) during cultivation, while manufacturing activities are expected to comply with EU-GMP, depending on the product, manufacturing stage and supply chain.

Israel

Israel has developed one of the world's most established medical cannabis regulatory frameworks. Producers supplying this market commonly demonstrate compliance through IMC-GAP aligned requirements.

Australia

Australia regulates medicinal cannabis through the Therapeutic Goods Administration. Depending on the manufacturing activities and supply chain, evidence of GMP compliance may be required for imported medicinal cannabis products.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom maintains its own framework for medicinal products. Pharmaceutical-grade medicinal cannabis products are generally expected to comply with GMP requirements, while cultivation and starting materials rely on recognized quality and traceability practices.

Key Takeaway

Although compliance expectations differ between markets, the underlying objective remains consistent: demonstrating quality, traceability and operational control throughout the supply chain.

Note: Regulatory frameworks continue to evolve. Producers should always verify the current requirements applicable to their intended export market and supply chain.

Different pathways. Different objectives.

Medical cannabis compliance is not based on a single standard. Each compliance pathway has been developed to address a specific stage of the production process, regulatory expectation or market requirement.

Understanding the purpose of each pathway helps producers determine which may be relevant to their operation, customers and export markets.

GACP Declaration

The foundation for good cultivation practices

The Good Agricultural and Collection Practices (GACP) guidelines, published by the World Health Organization and adopted by the European Medicines Agency for herbal starting materials, provide internationally recognized guidance for cultivation, harvesting and primary processing.

As GACP is a guideline rather than a certifiable standard, Control Union provides an independent GACP Declaration confirming alignment with these recognized principles.

Typically used by:

- Producers preparing for regulated export markets
- Organizations establishing documented cultivation practices

CUMCS Certification

Enhanced quality assurance for medical cannabis

The Control Union Medical Cannabis Standard (CUMCS) was developed specifically for the medical cannabis industry. It builds upon GACP principles by introducing additional requirements related to quality management, traceability, environmental controls and product integrity.

CUMCS supports organizations seeking to demonstrate a higher level of operational consistency and quality assurance.

Typically used by:

- Export-oriented producers
- Organizations supplying highly regulated markets

IMC-GAP Equivalency

Supporting access to the Israeli market

Israel has established specific regulatory expectations for imported medical cannabis. Control Union's IMC-GAP Equivalency program has been developed to demonstrate alignment with these market-specific requirements.

Typically used by:

- Producers supplying Israel
- Organizations requiring IMC-GAP aligned verification

EU-GMP Support

Preparing for pharmaceutical manufacturing

Good Manufacturing Practice applies to pharmaceutical manufacturing rather than agricultural production. Organizations supplying medicinal cannabis products to pharmaceutical markets may need to demonstrate compliance with GMP requirements, depending on their role within the supply chain.

Control Union supports producers through gap assessments and preparation activities as they progress toward pharmaceutical manufacturing expectations.

Typically used by:

- Pharmaceutical manufacturers
- Organizations preparing for EU pharmaceutical supply chains

Key Takeaway

Each compliance pathway serves a different purpose. Understanding how they relate allows producers to build a compliance approach that aligns with their operational objectives and intended markets.

Which pathway best aligns with your business objectives?

The following overview summarizes the primary purpose of each compliance pathway. While organizations may progress through multiple pathways over time, understanding their intended application is an important first step.

Decision Criteria	GACP Declaration	CUMCS Certification	IMC-GAP Equivalency	EU-GMP Support
Primary purpose	Demonstrate recognized good cultivation practices	Demonstrate enhanced quality assurance for medical cannabis	Support access to the Israeli market	Prepare for pharmaceutical manufacturing
Best suited for	Producers entering regulated markets	Export-oriented producers	Producers supplying Israel	Pharmaceutical manufacturers
Typical market application	International cultivation	Global regulated markets	Israel	European pharmaceutical markets
Main focus	Cultivation and harvesting	Cultivation, post-harvest and quality systems	Market-specific compliance	Manufacturing and pharmaceutical quality systems
Independent verification	Declaration	Certification	Certification package	Gap assessment and preparation
Typical implementation timeline	Approximately 1 month	1–2 months	1–2 months	Project dependent

Understanding the Relationship Between the Pathways

One of the most common misconceptions is that these pathways compete with one another. In reality, they often complement each other.

For many organizations, compliance develops progressively as operations mature and market ambitions expand.

Understanding common questions about exporting medical cannabis

Medical cannabis compliance can be complex, particularly for organizations preparing to supply regulated international markets for the first time. The following questions address some of the most common areas of uncertainty.

Is GACP mandatory?

Not in most jurisdictions. The Good Agricultural and Collection Practices (GACP) is an internationally recognized guideline developed to promote good agricultural and collection practices for medicinal plants. While it is generally not a legal certification requirement, many manufacturers, buyers and regulated markets expect producers to demonstrate alignment with GACP principles through independent verification.

Is GACP a certification?

No. GACP itself is a guideline rather than a certifiable standard. Certification bodies, including Control Union, can provide an independent declaration confirming that an operation has been assessed against recognized GACP principles.

Why would a producer choose CUMCS?

The Control Union Medical Cannabis Standard (CUMCS) was developed specifically for the medical cannabis industry to build upon GACP principles with additional requirements related to quality management, traceability and operational consistency. Organizations may choose CUMCS when seeking to demonstrate a higher level of quality assurance for regulated markets.

Does every producer need EU-GMP?

Not necessarily. EU-GMP applies to pharmaceutical manufacturing activities rather than agricultural production. Whether EU-GMP is required depends on the product, the role of the organization within the supply chain and the regulatory requirements of the destination market.

Can organizations progress through different compliance pathways over time?

Yes. As operations grow and target new markets, organizations often expand their compliance activities. What begins as alignment with recognized cultivation practices may later develop into more advanced quality systems or pharmaceutical manufacturing requirements, depending on business objectives.

Further Reading

- World Health Organization – Good Agricultural and Collection Practices for Medicinal Plants
- European Medicines Agency – GACP for Herbal Medicinal Products
- National regulatory authorities for destination export markets

Understanding **what to expect** during the certification process

Certification is more than an audit. It is a structured process designed to independently verify that an organization's practices align with the requirements of the selected compliance pathway.

While the scope and activities may vary depending on the program, the certification journey generally follows five key stages.

Stage 1

Define the Scope

Every certification journey begins by understanding your operation. This includes identifying the products, activities, facilities and intended markets so the appropriate compliance pathway and audit scope can be established.

Stage 2

Prepare for Assessment

Before the audit, documented procedures, records and operational practices are reviewed to confirm readiness for evaluation. Preparing in advance helps ensure the assessment reflects how the operation is managed on a day-to-day basis.

Stage 3

Independent Assessment

Qualified auditors conduct an independent evaluation against the applicable requirements. This typically includes document review, interviews with personnel and on-site verification of operational practices.

Stage 4

Certification or Declaration

When the applicable requirements have been successfully demonstrated, the relevant declaration or certification is issued. The type of recognition depends on the selected compliance pathway.

Stage 5

Ongoing Verification

Certification is designed to provide continued confidence over time. Periodic surveillance activities help verify that systems remain effective and continue to support quality, traceability and operational consistency as the organization evolves.

Why Independent Verification Matters

Certification and declarations issued by an independent third party provide objective confirmation that an organization's practices have been assessed against recognized requirements. This independent approach helps build confidence among customers, manufacturers, regulators and other stakeholders by ensuring assessments are impartial and consistent.



Every operation follows a different compliance journey.

Understanding the medical cannabis compliance landscape is the first step toward preparing for regulated international markets. Determining how those requirements apply to your own operation is the next.

Whether your organization is preparing for its first export, expanding into new markets or strengthening existing quality systems, understanding the appropriate compliance pathway begins with an informed discussion.

Why Work With Control Union?

For more than 100 years, Control Union has helped organizations around the world demonstrate compliance with the expectations of regulated international markets through independent certification, verification, and assurance services.

Whether you're entering regulated markets for the first time or expanding internationally, our specialists help you identify the most efficient compliance pathway for your business—reducing complexity while supporting access to multiple export markets through a single trusted certification partner.

- Experience supporting medical cannabis producers worldwide.
- Developer of the Control Union Medical Cannabis Standard (CUMCS).
- One audit, multiple certifications to reduce costs, streamline compliance, and support access to multiple regulated markets.
- ISO/IEC 17065 accredited Certification Body, providing independent certification backed by internationally recognized governance and qualified auditors.
- One of only two Certification Bodies approved by the Israeli Government to deliver its medical cannabis standard, enabling access to the Israeli market through the same audit process.
- International network of qualified auditors with experience across regulated export markets.
- Trusted by GMP buyers worldwide for credible, independent certification that supports supplier acceptance.

About Control Union

Control Union is an independent international certification body providing assurance services across agriculture, food, forestry, textiles, bioenergy and many other industries. Through a global network of offices and qualified auditors, we support organizations in demonstrating compliance with internationally recognized standards and market requirements.

Every operation is different.

If you would like to better understand how the different compliance pathways relate to your business, our specialists are available to discuss your objectives, target markets and certification options.

[Talk to a Medical Cannabis Expert](#)