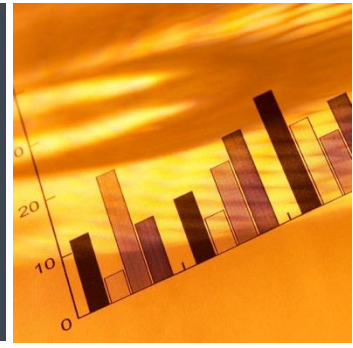


## RESEARCH SUMMARY

# Behaviours and Beliefs Related to Cannabis Before Legalization: A Public Safety Perspective



2018-S005

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BUILDING A SAFE AND RESILIENT CANADA

## Background

Over the past few years, the government of Canada has been preparing to legalize, regulate and restrict access to non-medical cannabis. In 2016, the Task Force on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation identified nine policy objectives, which served as a basis for the recent legalization. Three of the main policy objectives that are of particular importance to Public Safety Canada's mandate are 1) "protect young Canadians by keeping cannabis out of the hands of children and youth;" 2) "keep profits out of the hands of criminals, particularly organized crime;" and 3) "protect public health and safety by strengthening, where appropriate, laws and enforcement measures that deter and punish more serious cannabis offences, particularly selling and distributing to children and youth, selling outside of the regulatory framework, and operating a motor vehicle while under the influence of cannabis." (McLellan et al, 2016: 11)

Understanding the changes in perceptions and behaviours of those who use cannabis before and after the change in regime is important, as it will help to develop public safety policy and program initiatives, including education and crime prevention activities.

## Method

The 2017 Canadian Cannabis Survey (CCS) was developed through a collaboration between Public Safety Canada and Health Canada, with a view to collecting detailed information on cannabis use in Canada before legalization. In particular, CCS participants were asked about their driving habits after cannabis use, cannabis use in combination with alcohol or other drugs, interaction with police services because of possession of cannabis, sources of cannabis (i.e., where users obtained their cannabis), methods of

consumption, as well as the price they paid for their cannabis and the amount of cannabis they consumed.

The CCS was designed to fulfill certain quota requirements for people who used cannabis in the 12 months prior to the survey. Therefore, due to a potential participation bias, the survey is not meant to provide general population prevalence estimates for cannabis use, but rather to obtain detailed information about the habits of respondents who said they used cannabis and behaviours relating to their cannabis use.

The analyses that follow describe the self-reported behaviors of cannabis users for non-medical purposes (cannabis use for non-medical purposes is defined as use for a range of non-medical reasons (e.g., socially for enjoyment, pleasure, amusement or for spiritual, lifestyle and other non-medical reasons) in the 12 months prior to the survey.

The survey collected data from March 13, 2017 to May 24, 2017. In total, 9,215 respondents aged 16 years and older across all provinces and territories responded to the online survey. The sample included responses from 2,650 people who said that they had used cannabis in the 12 months prior to the survey for either non-medical or medical purposes.

## Findings

The analyses highlight a number of important findings, which will serve as a benchmark for future studies examining the trends following the implementation of the law in the fall of 2018. In particular, the results of the 2017 CCS show:

- Twenty-two percent (22%) of survey respondents reported having used cannabis in the 12 months prior to the survey. Among respondents who used cannabis, the most common methods of consumption were smoking (94%), eating (34%),

using a vaporizer and vape pen or e-cigarette (14% each).

- Methods of consuming cannabis differed by age group; however younger respondents who used cannabis most often utilized different ways of consuming, as compared with their older counterparts.
- Among those who used cannabis, the most frequent sources of cannabis were from a family member or friend (27%); shared amongst a group of friends (25%); acquaintance (23%); dealer or storefront dispensary (20%).
- Compared to their older counterparts, younger respondents who used cannabis were: 1) almost twice as likely to report having obtained it by sharing with a group of friends; and 2) most often reported obtaining cannabis from a dealer or a storefront dispensary.
- Although the majority of respondents agreed that using cannabis for non-medical purposes impairs a person's ability to drive a vehicle, nearly one-quarter (22%) nonetheless reported having driven within 2 hours of using cannabis.
- Frequent users of cannabis most often presented unsafe behaviours related to drug-impaired driving. Frequent cannabis users not only believed that cannabis does not impair driving, but were also the group most often to report having driven within 2 hours of using cannabis, as well as having been a passenger with someone who used cannabis within 2 hours of driving.
- Just over one-quarter of respondents aged 16 to 19 (28%), followed by those aged 55+ (30%) indicated having driven a motor vehicle within 2 hours of using non-medical cannabis, which represents the two groups to least often report having done so.
- A very small proportion of respondents who used cannabis reported having had interactions with police for their possession of non-medical cannabis (2%).
- Earlier age of cannabis initiation affects the quantity of cannabis consumed; the earlier the age at which someone first tried or started using cannabis, the more likely they are to report a higher daily quantity of cannabis consumed over the last 12 months.

- The greatest daily amounts of cannabis consumption for non-medical purposes were reported by those who: 1) grew their own cannabis; 2) obtained it from a dealer or storefront dispensary; and 3) obtained it from a Health Canada licensed producer by mail order.

## Implications

It is critical to understand the current perceptions and behaviours of those who use cannabis, as well as the possible behavioural and opinion changes after legalization, as it will help to develop public safety policy and program initiatives, including education and crime prevention activities. These aforementioned initiatives will ensure the main policy objectives of legalization, whether it is to reduce the involvement of organized crime in the cannabis industry or keep cannabis out of the hands of children and youth, are upheld.

Ongoing data and research will be needed to continue monitoring cannabis use and other public safety metrics following legalization. Public Safety Canada will continue to work in partnership with its federal partners to sustain appropriate data collection that examines driving habits after cannabis use, interaction with law enforcement because of cannabis possession, sources of cannabis, methods of consumption, price for cannabis, as well as new areas of interest that will arise with legalization.

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## Source

Koundakjian, K., Maslov, A., Ellingwood H. (2019). *Behaviours and Beliefs Related to Cannabis Before Legalization: A Public Safety Perspective*. Research Report 2019-R005. Ottawa, Ontario: Public Safety Canada

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