

# **Cannabis Use in Canadian Youth Post-Legalization: Perspectives of Youth, Parents, and Service Providers**

Category: Oral Presentation

## Abstract Body

Canada has one of the highest prevalence rates of cannabis use globally, and across age groups cannabis use is highest in young adults aged 20-24 (50%) followed by 16–19-year-olds (37%). Canada legalized recreational cannabis with the purpose of protecting the health of young people by restricting their access to cannabis. Youth cannabis rates have not declined since legalization and youth report easy access to cannabis. Youth cannabis use is associated with several adverse effects including poor psychosocial functioning, impaired cognitive performance, respiratory distress, cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome, psychosis, anxiety, depression, and increased risk of suicidality. A second purpose of the Cannabis Act is to increase public awareness of the health risks, but this objective has also fallen short. There is misinformation and low cannabis literacy among Canadians. The Canadian Cannabis Survey (2022) showed that 48% of Canadians have not noticed any public education campaigns on cannabis and 52% have not noticed any health warning messages on cannabis products. The aim of this study was to examine how youth, parents, and service providers perceive youth cannabis use in Canada since legalization to identify gaps that need to be addressed in policies, services, training, and education. This qualitative study used a community-based participatory research approach and worked in partnership with Families for Addiction Recovery (FAR) – a national charity founded by parents of youth with addiction concerns. We conducted virtual semi-structured interviews and analyzed data using thematic analysis. The sample included 88 participants (n=31 youth, n=26 parents, n=31 service providers). The following themes were identified across the data of all three participant groups: (1) concerns about risks and harms of youth cannabis use, (2) minimization of cannabis risks and harms for youth, (3) stigma has reduced, but not for youth of equity deserving groups, (4) youth are using cannabis to cope with mental health concerns, (5) public education on youth cannabis use is minimal, (6) access to mental health and addiction services is challenging, (7) cannabis use is not screened by most service providers, (8) service providers need more training and education, (9) parents are often excluded from treatment, and (10) there is a need for youth-centred harm reduction strategies for cannabis use. Implications for research, policy, practice, and education will be discussed.

## Key Words

- Adolescent/Young Adult Populations
- Assessment/screening
- Cannabis/Synthetic Cannabinoids
- Equity, Diversity, Inclusion issues
- Education

#### Learning Objective # 1

Describe concerns related to cannabis use among youth since legalization.

#### Learning Objective # 2

Examine how to address public health concerns related to youth cannabis use.

#### Reference # 1

Doggett, A., Battista, K., Jiang, Y., de Groh, M., & Leatherdale, S. T. (2022). Patterns of cannabis use among Canadian youth over time; examining changes in mode and frequency using latent transition analysis. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 57(4), 548-559.

#### Reference # 2

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. (2023). A public health perspective on cannabis legalization and regulation in Canada. Ottawa, Canada. Retrieved from [https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/CCSA\\_Cannabis\\_Act\\_Legislative\\_review\\_update\\_1\\_en.pdf](https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/CCSA_Cannabis_Act_Legislative_review_update_1_en.pdf)

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