

Perspectives of Young Adults on Cannabis Use in Alberta



Research Focus

This evidence includes findings on young adult's perspectives on cannabis use and offers recommendations for young adults, parents, educators, and policymakers.

Research Overview

Young adults aged 18 to 29 have experienced the emergence of legalized cannabis access during the last several years. This document summarizes their perspectives as recorded by a Leger survey of 706 young adults completed between August and September of 2024 as well as focus groups of young adults aged 18 to 25 who use or have used cannabis. The survey examined cannabis use, consumer behaviour, attitudes towards risks and responsibility, and opinions on legislation and policy. Research is ongoing on the effects of cannabis on young adults; further research will expand on these findings.

Key Findings

Cannabis Use

- Among Alberta young adults, 30% have never used cannabis, 10% have tried it once, and 59% have used it more than once (66% outside Edmonton and Calgary).
- Among young cannabis users in Alberta, 6% started before age 13, 22% between 13-15, and 24% at 16-17, while 52% waited until 18 or older.
- Among young Albertans who avoid cannabis, 84% cite lack of interest, with concerns including mental health (49%), physical health (47%), addiction (38%), academics (29%), and finances/career (22%).
- Of young people who use cannabis, some are using it heavily. Of this sample, 21% report using cannabis four or more times per week, and 20% reported daily or almost daily use.

CoRE Insights

- 1 Over half (51%) of users surveyed have had negative experiences, with mental effects more common than physical ones.
- 2 Since legalization, young people say cannabis is easier to access (59%), more visible in public (51%), used more by friends/family (37%), cheaper (17%), and higher quality (25%).
- 3 Heavy cannabis use among young adults, particularly those who began using before age 18, is prevalent, with 21% using it four or more times per week.
- 4 61% have considered reducing or stopping their use, reflecting awareness of potential risks.

Health and Risk Experiences

- While 63% never felt unable to stop using cannabis, 36% experienced this at least once, and 9% felt this daily.
- One in five (20%) cannabis users have used it in hazardous situations like driving, operating machinery, or childcare.
- Over half (51%) of users have had negative experiences, with mental effects more common than physical ones.
- Young adults think that using cannabis once or twice per week will lead to physical harm in 39% of cases and 51% think that it will lead to mental harm.
- Cannabis use patterns vary substantially between people, from social use to attempts at managing mental health concerns.
- Cannabis users are aware there are risks with cannabis use but were largely unconcerned with long-term effects.

Key Findings (con't)

Consumer Preferences

- Price (26%) and strength (23%) are key factors for cannabis buyers, with 75% aware of THC levels.
- Cannabis users are divided on potency; half prefer higher strength, half do not.
- One-third (33%) are unsure about THC risks, but 18% see high-THC flower and 29% view high-strength vapes as the biggest mental health risks.

Legislation and Policy

- Since legalization, young people say cannabis is easier to access (59%), more visible in public (51%), used more by friends/family (37%), cheaper (17%), and higher quality (25%).
- Over half support a cap on cannabis strength (55%) and taxation based on potency (53%).
- Large majorities support better cannabis education in schools (86%) and clearer public health information (89%).

How to Take Action

Teens and Young Adults

Teenagers and young adults should stay informed about the physical and mental health risks of cannabis, which are greater with early use. It's okay to avoid cannabis, delay use or not use it at all. If you're struggling with cannabis use, don't hesitate to seek support from a parent, trusted adult, or professional.

Teens and Young Adults

Parents and educators should raise awareness about the physical and mental health risks of cannabis, emphasizing the benefits of delaying or avoiding use. When educating children, rely on unbiased sources rather than industry-sponsored research. Support early intervention by connecting struggling youth with help and fostering protective environments through family activities, sports, arts, and social groups.

Policymakers

Strategies should include limiting access to higher strength cannabis for younger consumers and investing in public education campaigns about the risks of substance use, including cannabis. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the current regulatory framework, along with assessments of any changes, are essential. Additionally, evaluating the impact of age restrictions on the purchase and consumption of addictive substances, including cannabis, should be considered.

Links to Research Materials

[8.a Alberta Polling - Leger - 27 Sept 2024.pdf](#)

[8.b. Focus Groups - StoneOlafson - 24 Sept 2024.pdf](#)