Health Reports: Looking back from 2020, how cannabis use and related behaviours changed in Canada

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By late 2020, one in five Canadians (20%) reported having used cannabis in the past three months, which was more than both the 14% reporting use before legalization and the 18% reporting use in the first few months after enactment of the *Cannabis Act* (October 2018). Daily or almost daily use also increased to 7.9% from 6.1% in 2019 and 5.4% in 2018.

These findings are from a new study, released today in *Health Reports*. The study spans three years—from before legalization to about two years after. Data from three quarters of the National Cannabis Survey (NCS), including data collected in the fourth quarter of 2020 and the first quarters of 2018 and 2019, were used to more fully examine changes in Canadians' use of cannabis since legalization and following the October 2019 policy change allowing the legal production and sale of a wider array of cannabis products, including edibles.

With the inclusion of data collected after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared and wide-ranging public health measures dramatically changed daily routines, it is possible that some of the changes in consumption reported here may be related to the pandemic. According to the study, "Alcohol and cannabis use during the pandemic: Canadian Perspectives Survey Series 6," released in March 2021, more than one in three Canadians (34%) who had previously consumed cannabis said their consumption had increased compared with the pre-pandemic period. Stress, boredom and loneliness, but also ease of access to cannabis, were all cited as reasons. However, the permanence of this increase will be determined only with regular monitoring and once significant proportions of the population have been vaccinated and daily routines largely reinstated.

Dried flower and leaf still more popular but use of edibles is rising

For the first time, rates of overall consumption were comparable by gender in 2020, with about one in five men and women each reporting having used cannabis in the past three months. According to the NCS, dried flower and leaf remains the most popular product (71% of consumers reported having used this product in the past three months), and smoking remains the most common method of consumption (58% identified this method as the one they used most often), although both are in decline. By contrast, use of edibles is rising among cannabis consumers (41% by the fourth quarter of 2020 compared with less than one-third in 2019 and 2018).

More Canadians getting cannabis legally or growing it

One of the goals of legalization was the elimination (or substantial reduction) of the cannabis black market. The other main goals were to keep cannabis out of the hands of youth and to protect public health and safety by allowing adults access to legal cannabis. According to this study, there is some evidence that this may be working. An estimated 68% of cannabis users reported obtaining at least some of the cannabis they consumed from a legal source in 2020, higher than both before legalization in 2018 (23%) and also just after legalization in 2019 (47%). Growing cannabis, either themselves or by someone else, was a supply source for 14% of consumers in 2020, higher than in 2018 (8%) or 2019 (9%).

Obtaining cannabis from other sources was also common in 2020, but generally less so than before legalization. For example, in 2020, roughly one-third (35%) of consumers reported having obtained cannabis from an illegal supplier and 29% had obtained it from (or had shared it with) friends and family. The corresponding 2018 estimates were higher (51% and 47%), as was the percentage reporting getting it from friends and family in 2019 (37%).

Access to legal cannabis increased eightfold

Canada-wide access to legal cannabis stores (in addition to online legal suppliers) increased nearly eightfold since legalization (from 182 to 1,445 stores between the fourth quarters of 2018 and 2020), making cannabis easier to obtain legally.

Because consumers can obtain cannabis from multiple sources, the data presented in this release cannot be used to assess the respective market shares of illegal and legal cannabis.

This report is part of an ongoing series of products released by Statistics Canada related to the economic, social and health aspects of cannabis, providing information on consumption, legal sales and cannabis-related offences. An accompanying infographic, "How cannabis use changed in Canada, 2018 to 2020," is also available.

Note to readers

The target population of the National Cannabis Survey (NCS) was the household population aged 15 and older in the 10 provinces. NCS (provincial) samples contained an average of 5,540 respondents and had an average response rate of 49%. The majority of survey respondents (61%) completed the online survey unassisted by using the secure access code sent by mail. The remainder were contacted by phone and asked to participate with the aid of a trained interviewer.

Cannabis includes marijuana, hashish, hash oil and any other preparation of the cannabis plant.

Available tables: table 13-10-0383-01.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 5262.

The article "Looking back from 2020, how cannabis use and related behaviours changed in Canada" is now available in the April 2021 online issue of *Health Reports*, Vol. 32, no. 4 (**82-003-X**).

The infographic "How cannabis use changed in Canada, 2018 to 2020" is now available as part of the series *Statistics Canada – Infographics* (**11-627-M**).

This issue of Health Reports also contains the article "Association of frailty and pre-frailty with increased risk of mortality among older Canadians".

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For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; **STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca**) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; **STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca**).