

Epidemiology and Public Health Sciences - Poster Abstracts / Épidémiologie et sciences de la santé publique - Abrégés affiches

Abstract #165

A comprehensive profile of cannabis consumers living with HIV after legalization: The Ontario Cannabis and HIV Survey

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Background: Canada legalized cannabis for medical purposes in 2001 and recreational purposes in 2018. Our aim was to produce a comprehensive profile of Ontarians living with HIV who use cannabis for medical or recreational purposes to document their post-legalization changes in use.

Methods: Participants were recruited from the Ontario HIV Treatment Network Cohort Study, a multi-site clinical cohort. Those reporting past-year cannabis use were invited to complete the Ontario Cannabis and HIV Survey assessing patterns of past-year cannabis use, since legalization, and since COVID-19. Data were collected between August 2022 and December 2023. We used descriptive statistics to describe the sample.

Results: Among 292 respondents, 84% were male and 72% were White, with a mean age of 50 (SD=13). Post-legalization, 34% of participants used cannabis more frequently (versus 9% less frequently) due to easier access, pleasure, safer products, more product variety, and less stigma. Post-COVID-19, 36% used more frequently versus 4% less frequently. Reasons included stress/anxiety, pleasure, more opportunities to consume, boredom, and loneliness. Common products for recreational and medicinal users, respectively, were smoked flower (77%; 69%), edibles (62%; 43%) and vaped flower (28%; 23%). Some did not know the THC content of their products (17-19% medicinal; 13-23% recreational). Only 36% of medicinal users had healthcare provider authorization and fewer still (7%) had insurance coverage; also, 17% used cannabis to manage symptoms of insomnia, 15% anxiety, and 13% depression. Screening for problematic use indicated 71% had a moderate risk for health and other problems while only 3% reported high risk of dependence and severe problems.

Conclusions: Our findings provide a rare documentation of cannabis use among people living with HIV. Use patterns were broadly similar for recreational and medical purposes and across product types, except edibles and beverages. More consumer education is needed regarding cannabinoid levels and lower-risk cannabis use.