



Cannabis Use and Canadian Adults

A survey on use, interest and information needs

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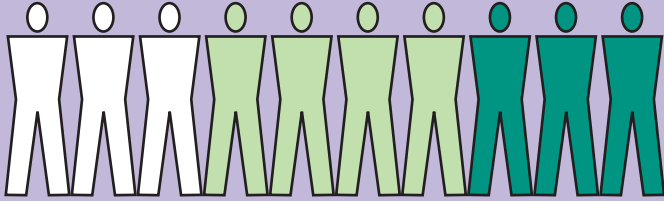
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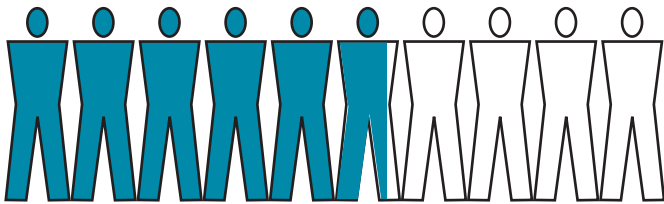
HIGHLIGHTS



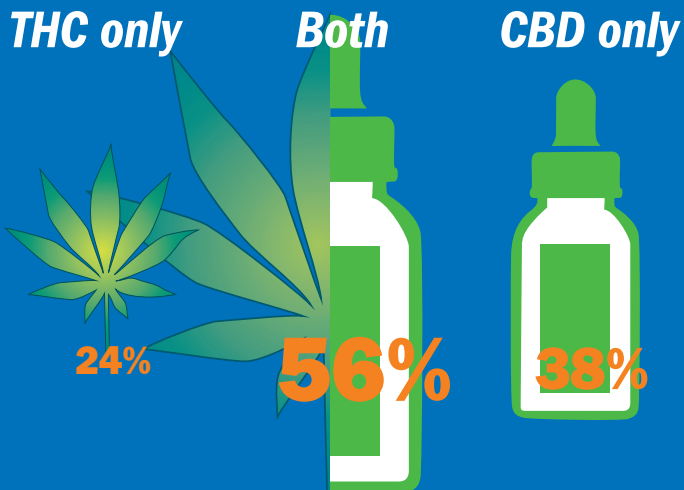
30% of survey respondents have used cannabis since its legalization.



Of the 70% who were not cannabis users, 40% indicated they were interested in its use, in part because it's now legal, and the majority were interested for medicinal reasons.



58% of the total sample surveyed indicated that they would like to learn more about cannabis and its risks and benefits.



Of those using cannabis, 24% used THC products only, 38% CBD products only and 56% a mix of both THC and CBD products.

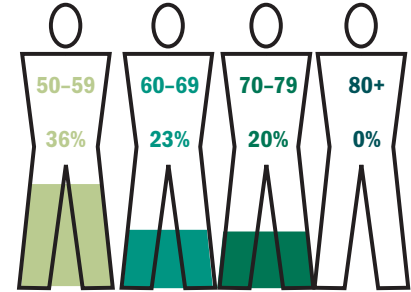
Of the 30% who use cannabis:

36% between the age of 50–59,

23% between the age of 60–69,

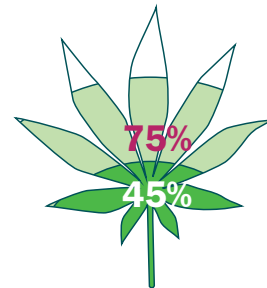
20% between the age of 70–79,

none over the age of 80 years used cannabis.



27% of current cannabis users have used it for more than 5 years whereas 40% had recently started using (since the legalization of cannabis in October 2018).

Those who use it medically, use it primarily because of **chronic pain, inflammation, sleep issues, muscle pain, and anxiety.**



75% use cannabis products for medical reasons and 45% for recreational reasons.

The forms of cannabis most commonly used were **oils ready for ingestion, edibles, and dried flowers/buds** for smoking or vaping.

INTRODUCTION

The most recent data from Statistics Canada's National Cannabis Survey (third quarter 2019) show 7% of Canadians aged 65 years and older consumed cannabis, up from 1% in 2012. While less older Canadians use cannabis than younger Canadians, for example, those 15 to 24 years old (26%) – older Canadians are the fastest growing segment of users in Canada. The rate of use by older adults is expected to continue to increase with the recent legalization as its acceptance is expected to increase medicinal use and prior-users revisit cannabis use recreationally. In recognition of this emerging user-group, government agencies have identified the need for relevant and current evidence-based information in the area of

cannabis use and its effect on the older adult with an emphasis on cannabis public education, awareness, harm reduction and prevention initiatives. In 2019, Active Aging Canada received funding from Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program for a project aimed at increasing public awareness and provide public education around cannabis use issues for the older adult population. To ensure we develop materials that meet the education needs of older adults, we conducted an online survey for Canadian adults to share their thoughts and ideas on the topic; specifically, knowledge of and experience with cannabis, and how they would like to receive information on cannabis.

METHODOLOGY

Survey Design

The online survey was developed by the Project Evaluator and Executive Director and pilot tested by our core project team members. The survey questions were based on common themes documented through a scan of cannabis related literature and topics identified by the Expert Review Panel during the initial project planning meeting. The survey included single-answer multiple choice questions. It began with basic demographic questions, including geographic location, gender, and age. Then the survey focused on the respondent's knowledge of and experience with cannabis, and how they would like to receive information on cannabis. The survey was distributed via an e-blast to Active Aging Canada's member database and network (mainly older adult organizations, 900+). It was also sent to members of the Older Adults Centres' Association of Ontario, the Manitoba Association for Seniors, the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, and the Canadian Public Health Association. It was also posted on the website of Active Aging Canada and on social media accounts.

Survey Analyses

The survey findings are presented using basic frequencies and percentages. In addition, cross tabulations based on gender and age group were run to determine if there were any significant differences in answers based on these variables. This helped provide a better understanding of the needs of subsets of adults.

Results and Implications

The initial survey was run between January 6 and February 1, 2020 (n=168) and then again between June 18, and July 10, 2020 (n=470) with 638 respondents in total. There were respondents from every province/territory in Canada except Nunavut and the Yukon; with the majority residing in Ontario (70%) (Table 1). Of the 470 respondents who completed the second offering of the survey, 80% (379/470) noted that they reside in an urban area and 18% (83/470) in a rural area; 2% (8/470) were unsure.

Table 1: Province/Territory of Residence (n=638)

Province/Territory	Percentage	Frequency
Ontario	70%	447
Manitoba	13%	82
British Columbia	5%	30
Saskatchewan	3%	18
Alberta	3%	16
Nova Scotia	2%	12
Quebec	2%	12
Prince Edward Island	1%	9
Northwest Territories	<1%	4
New Brunswick	<1%	3
Nfld. and Labrador	<1%	3
Unknown	<1%	2
Nunavut	0%	0
Yukon	0%	0

Seventy-eight percent of the respondents (501) identified as female, 21% (134) as male and <1% (3) as non-binary or other. Respondents varied in age, with the majority ranging between 60-79 years of age (Table 2).

Table 2: Age of Respondents (n=636)

Province/Territory	Percentage	Frequency
Under 50	12%	75
50-59	14%	89
60-69	27%	173
70-79	34%	221
80+	12%	78
Missing	<1%	2

Cannabis Usage

When asked if they have used cannabis products since they became legal, 70% (449/638) of respondents noted they had not used cannabis products and 30% (189/638) have used cannabis products. Significantly more respondents under the age of 50 have used cannabis products than any other age range - 58% vs. 43% of those between 50-59 years, 34% of those between 60-69 years, 25% of those between 70-79 years and 19% of those 80 or over.

Respondents with Experience with Cannabis

Of the 189 respondents who used cannabis products, 24% (45/189) used THC products only, 38% (71/189) CBD products only and 56% (105/189) a mix of both THC and CBD products. THC products were more commonly used by those under 50 years (36%) compared with those between 50-59 years (23%), 60-69 years (20%), 70-79 years (13%) and over 80 years (0%). As noted in Table 3, respondents used cannabis in a variety of forms, with the most common being oils ready for ingestion, edibles, and dried flowers/buds for smoking or vaping.

Table 3: Form of Cannabis Used (n=189)

Form of Cannabis	Percentage	Frequency
Oils ready for ingestion	60%	114
Edibles – e.g. candy, brownies, tea, etc.	43%	81
Dried flowers/buds for smoking or vaping	36%	68
Topical creams to apply to skin	25%	47
Ground dried flowers for smoking or vaping	22%	42
Capsules – cannabis oils in capsule form	22%	42
Pre-rolled joints for smoking	20%	37
Oral spray ready for ingestion	12%	23
Concentrates – shatter, budder, wax, etc.	6%	12

When broken down by gender, more male respondents than female used dried flowers/buds for smoking or vaping (58% vs. 29%) and ground dried flowers for smoking or vaping (41% vs. 17%). There were also some differences in usage by age group, as noted in Table 4.

Table 4: Age by Usage Method (n=189)

Usage Method	Under 50	50--59	60-69	70-79	80+
Edibles – e.g. candy, brownies, tea, etc.	73%	35%	43%	27%	31%
Dried flowers/buds for smoking or vaping	82%	17%	36%	16%	8%
Oils ready for ingestion	59%	61%	63%	69%	46%
Ground dried flowers for smoking or vaping	68%	4%	11%	11%	0%
Pre-rolled joints for smoking	45%	4%	16%	7%	0%
Capsules – cannabis oils in capsule form	32%	26%	20%	13%	23%
Oral spray ready for ingestion	27%	17%	7%	0%	0%
Topical creams to apply to skin	18%	22%	32%	23%	23%
Concentrates – shatter, budder, wax, etc.	14%	0%	5%	2%	0%

Preferred methods of using cannabis for all respondents is shown in Table 5. When preferred methods by gender were explored there were significant differences, with male respondents preferring dried flowers/buds for smoking or vaping (39%), ground dried flowers for smoking or vaping (35%), and edibles (32%), and female respondents preferring edibles (34%) and ingestible oils (40%).

Table 5: Preferred Form of Cannabis (n=189)

Form of Cannabis	Percentage	Frequency
Oils ready for ingestion	38%	71
Edibles – e.g. candy, brownies, tea, etc.	34%	63
Dried flowers/buds for smoking or vaping	24%	45
Topical creams to apply to skin	21%	39
Capsules – cannabis oils in capsule form	17%	32
Ground dried flowers for smoking or vaping	12%	23
Oral spray ready for ingestion	8%	16
Pre-rolled joints for smoking	6%	11
Concentrates – shatter, budder, wax, etc.	4%	7

More than half of respondents (64% - 121/189) have used cannabis products more than 20 times in the last five years. Eleven percent (21/189) have used them between 1 and 3 times, 13% (24/189) between 4 and 10 times, and 12% (23/189) between 11 and 20 times.

Of the 189 respondents who have used cannabis products in the last five years, 64% (121/189) are currently using them and 31% (59/189) are not. The other 5% (9/189) of respondents did not answer this question. When asked how long they have been using cannabis products or did use them, the largest percentage noted for more than five years, as outlined in Table 6. A higher percentage of respondents under 50 (50%) and between 60-69 years (32%) have been using cannabis for more than 5 years. There was no difference in usage by gender.

Table 6: Length of Use (n=189)

Timeframe	Percentage	Frequency
Less than 3 months	16%	30
3 to 6 months	11%	21
7 to 12 months	13%	24
1 to 2 years	20%	39
2 to 3 years	5%	9
3 to 4 years	4%	7
4 to 5 years	3%	5
More than 5 years	27%	51
Missing	1%	3

A total of 75% (142/189) of all respondents use cannabis products for medical reasons and 45% (85/189) for recreational reasons. More respondents under the age of 50 (86%) use it for recreational purposes, compared with those between 50-59 years (35%), 60-69 years (34%), 70-79 years (31%) and 80 or older (0%). Respondents under 50 years were also less likely than those in other age brackets to use it for medical reasons (55% vs. 74% of those 50-59, 81% of those 60-69, 84% of those 70-79, and 92% of those 80+). The main medical reasons for which respondents are using cannabis products are outlined in Table 7.

Table 7: Medical Reasons (n=142)

Medical Reasons	Percentage	Frequency
Chronic pain/Intermittent pain	54%	75
Inflammation	44%	61
Insomnia/sleep issues	42%	59
Muscle tightness/pain	40%	55
Anxiety	30%	41
Depression	15%	21
Migraines/headaches	10%	14
Nausea	8%	11
Joint pain/arthritis	5%	7
Appetite issues	4%	6
Cancer	2%	3
Seizures/spasticity	1%	1
Glaucoma	0%	0

Seventy-two percent (135/189) of respondents feel they have a good understanding of the risks and benefits of using cannabis products, with 24% (46/189) feeling they somewhat do and 4% (8/189) feeling that they do not. The main information sources they accessed to learn about cannabis were the Internet and print materials, as noted in Table 8.

Table 8: Sources of Information (n=189)

Sources	Percentage	Frequency
Online	53%	101
Print materials	51%	96
A doctor/nurse practitioner	36%	68
Friends/Family	30%	57
Cannabis shop staff	25%	48
Other professionals/ workshops	6%	11
A nurse	4%	8
Haven't gotten any information	4%	8

Respondents with No Experience with Cannabis

Of the 449 out of 638 survey respondents who have not used cannabis products since they became legal in Canada, 40% (179/449) noted that they have considered it and 60% (270/449) have not. Seventy-three percent (130) of the 179 who have considered using them noted it is because it is now legal in Canada. The most common reasons they have considered using them for is medical reasons (85% - 153/179), with a smaller number considering using them for recreational reasons (21% - 37/179). The main medical conditions respondents are considering using cannabis for are outlined in Table 9.

Table 9: Medical Reasons Considering Cannabis Use For (n=153)

Medical Reasons	Percentage	Frequency
Chronic pain/Intermittent pain	49%	75
Inflammation	46%	71
Muscle tightness/pain	41%	63
Insomnia/sleep issues	25%	38
Anxiety	25%	38
Depression	11%	17
Migraines/headaches	8%	12
Cancer	3%	4
Arthritis /joint pain	3%	4
Glaucoma	2%	3
Nerve pain	2%	3
Appetite issues	1%	2
Seizures/spasticity	1%	1
Fibromyalgia	1%	2
Nausea	0%	0

Of the 179 respondents who noted that they have considered using cannabis now that it is legal, 37% (66/179) feel they have a good understanding of the risks and benefits of using cannabis, 37% (67/179) feel they sort of have a good understanding, and 26% (46/179) feel they do not. As noted in Table 10, the most common sources of information on cannabis risks and benefits accessed by this group were print materials and the Internet.

Table 10: Sources of Information (n=179)

Sources	Percentage	Frequency
Print materials	46%	82
Online	36%	64
Friends/Family	23%	41
Haven't gotten any information	21%	38
A doctor/nurse practitioner	13%	23
Other professionals/workshops	7%	13
A nurse	5%	9
Cannabis shop staff	4%	7
Media	2%	3

Interest in Learning More about Cannabis

All survey respondents were asked if they would like to learn more about cannabis and its risks and benefits, of which 58% (373/638) noted that they would. A significantly higher percentage of these respondents were female (63%) versus male (43%). The ways in which respondents would like to receive information is outlined in Table 11.

Table 11: Methods of Receiving Information (n=373)

Methods	Percentage	Frequency
An easy to use website	73%	271
Brochures, posters and fact sheets made available in doctor offices, pharmacies, etc.	44%	164
An email newsletter	37%	138
Senior's Fairs	28%	105
Videos	20%	75
A social media campaign – e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.	16%	61
Online question and answer forum	16%	59
Local newspaper	14%	51
Blogs or Vlogs	5%	18
Workshops/presentations	1%	4
Webinars	1%	5
One-on-one with health care workers/experts	<1%	2
TV/Radio	<1%	2
Literature	<1%	2

There were no significant differences in ways in which male and female respondents wish to receive information, but there was a significant difference in age groups interested in receiving information via social media – e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Thirty-five percent of respondents under 50 years and 42% between 50-59 years are interested in a social media campaign compared to 11% of those between 60-69, 5% of those between 70-79 and 7% of those 80 or older.

The key topics respondents would like to learn about are outlined below.

Table 12: Topics of Interest (n=373)

Topics	Percentage	Frequency
What are the health risks associated with CBD and THC?	71%	264
What are the benefits of using CBD and THC?	69%	259
What types of medical/health issues is cannabis used for?	66%	248
What are the health risks associated with the different methods of using CBD and THC - e.g. smoking, ingesting, etc.?	62%	233
How does cannabis affect the body?	53%	198
How long does it take for each method to work - e.g. smoking, ingesting, etc.?	47%	174
What are the different methods of using CBD and THC - e.g. smoking, ingesting, etc.?	46%	171
What is the difference between CBD and THC?	43%	161
What are the legal guidelines for using cannabis in Canada?	38%	143
When and where should I use cannabis?	30%	113
Can you overdose on cannabis?	28%	103
Where do I get cannabis?	23%	87
How do I protect my family and pets from accidentally/ inadvertently consuming my cannabis?	16%	58
What is cannabis?	15%	55
Research on the benefits - e.g. clinical trials, efficacy trials, meta-analysis, etc.	3%	10
Proper/safe dosing	2%	7
How cannabis works?	<1%	2

More male respondents than female respondents are interested in learning what cannabis is (25% vs. 13%). There were no significant differences by age group.

Final Thoughts and Next Steps

This survey offers a number of insights into the topic of cannabis and Canadian older adults; although our sample is one of convenience of online survey respondents and therefore not representative of the whole Canadian older adult population. The survey results are similar to emerging data indicating both increased use of, and interest in, cannabis among older adults. As the Canadian population continues to age it can be expected there will be continued growth in interest and use of cannabis. Therefore, there is a need to equip older adults with educational resources.

Active Aging Canada will be additionally informed by focus groups as it develops relevant resources that are accessible and enhance the capacity of older Canadians to make informed decisions on cannabis use.



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