

Health Reports: Analysis of trends in the prevalence of cannabis use in Canada, 1985 to 2015

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The Canadian federal government has committed to legalizing, regulating, and restricting access to non-medical use of cannabis in 2018. To prepare for this change, Statistics Canada has been adapting the national statistical system to measure the social and economic impacts of legalized cannabis. A new study released today in *Health Reports* examines the long-term trends in the use of cannabis in Canada for the first time by comparing nine national surveys of the household population that collected information about cannabis use from 1985 to 2015. Understanding past use will help inform future trends of cannabis use following legalization.

The results of this study indicate that cannabis use more than doubled from 1985 (5.6%) to 2015 (12.3%) among Canadians aged 15 years and older. The results are based on several national surveys including the Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CTADS), the Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS) and the 1985 Health Promotion Survey. Each survey asked about past-year cannabis use and had target populations that included youth and adults in every province.

Trends for 2004 to 2015, for which the data from CTUMS and CTADS were most comparable, suggest that past-year cannabis use differed by age group and sex. During this period, use remained stable among 15 to 17 year old males, but decreased among 15 to 17 year old females and 18 to 24 year olds (both sexes). Use increased during this period among people aged 25 or older.

The most recent data from 2015 show that use was highest among those aged 18 to 24 (28.4%), compared with about 18% among those aged 15 to 17 and 25 to 44; 7.0% among 45 to 64 year olds; and 1.6% among those 65 or older.

The trend information released today was instrumental in the development of [Experimental Estimates of Cannabis Consumption in Canada, 1960 to 2015](#). The process used for estimating cannabis consumption is described in the technical report [Constructing Historical Cannabis Consumption Volume Estimates for Canada, 1960 to 2015](#), also released today. These reports are part of an ongoing series of products released by Statistics Canada related to the economic and social aspects of cannabis, including information on consumption, prices and cannabis-related offences. All information products released to date by Statistics Canada, as well as forthcoming products, can be found on the new [Cannabis Stats Hub](#).

Note to readers

The nine national surveys that included drug use questions can be classified into three types: 1) health or social—Health Promotion Survey, General Social Survey, and Canadian Community Health Survey—Mental Health and Well-being; 2) addiction—National Alcohol and Drug Survey, Canada's Alcohol and Other Drugs Survey, and Canadian Addiction Survey; and 3) alcohol, drug and/or tobacco monitoring—Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS), Canadian Drug Use Monitoring Survey, and Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CTADS). CTADS and CTUMS are funded by Health Canada and administered by Statistics Canada.

While the results of these surveys can be combined to estimate the evolution of cannabis consumption, the surveys were designed to address different data and policy needs and are not perfectly comparable.



"[Analysis of trends in the prevalence of cannabis use in Canada, 1985 to 2015](#)" is now available in the February 2018 online issue of *Health Reports*, Vol. 29, no. 2 ([82-003-X](#)).

This issue of *Health Reports* also contains the article "[Positional accuracy of geocoding from residential postal codes versus full street addresses](#)."

Also available:

Also released today is a technical paper titled "[Constructing Historical Cannabis Consumption Volume Estimates for Canada, 1960 to 2015](#)" which is part of the *Analytical Studies: Methods and References* series ([11-633-X](#)). This paper discusses the process for estimating the volume of cannabis consumption in Canada by age group from 1960 to 2015 using integrated modern and historical data sources. The period covers the illegal market and the legal market as it has developed.

Additional information on cannabis consumption in Canada can be found in the research article [Experimental Estimates of Cannabis Consumption in Canada, 1960 to 2015](#), which is part of the *Economic Insights* series ([11-626-X](#)), released on December 18, 2017.

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