

Five years since legalization, what have we learned about cannabis in Canada?

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On October 17, 2023, it will have been five years since cannabis was legalized for non-medical use, production and sale in Canada, making Canada the first major industrialized country to provide legal and regulated access to cannabis for non-medical purposes.

To measure the social, health and economic impacts of legalized cannabis, Statistics Canada identified data needs and adapted the national statistical system. This included introducing new surveys, exploring alternative data sources, adding new questions to existing surveys and integrating cannabis into the Canadian System of Macroeconomic Accounts.

A new presentation released today, titled "[Research to Insights: Cannabis in Canada](#)," provides an overview of statistical findings, along with charts, to summarize what we have learned about the cannabis industry and Canadian's use of cannabis since its legalization. Here are some highlights from the release.

Cannabis use had been steadily increasing over the 30 years before legalization

The rate of cannabis use more than doubled from 1985 to 2017, from 5.6% to 14.8%.

After legalization, cannabis use is higher

In 2021, 22% of Canadians aged 15 years and older reported using cannabis in the past year. The rates of cannabis use were higher than the rest of Canada in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, whereas those in Quebec remained lower.

Some studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic suggested that cannabis consumption may have increased in response to the changed daily routines and related stress. Whether the higher rates of cannabis use reported during the pandemic will continue is yet to be determined, but as daily routines are reinstated and newer data become available, this can be studied.

Cannabis use also differs by age and increases for most age groups

Cannabis use is most common among 18- to 24-year-olds. Use among 15- to 17-year-olds has not increased since legalization.

Canada's cannabis sector grew from October 2018 to December 2022 but started to decline in 2023

The cannabis sector was valued at \$10.8 billion in 2023, an increase from \$6.4 billion when cannabis for non-medical purposes was first legalized.

Cannabis-related drug offences drop as a result of legalization

Before legalization, cannabis possession was almost always illegal and accounted for the majority of cannabis-related drug offences. After legalization, total cannabis-related offences fell overall, and under the new legislation, most offences are related to illicit importation and exportation. For example, in 2022, two-thirds (67%) of the 10,824 total cannabis offences were for illicit importation and exportation, and 12% of cannabis-related offences were for possession.



More Canadians get cannabis legally

An estimated 68% of cannabis users reported obtaining at least some of the cannabis they consumed from a legal source in 2020, higher than the percentages reported before legalization in 2018 (23%) and just after legalization in 2019 (47%). This accords with other data suggesting that, by the first half of 2023, more than 70% of the total value of cannabis consumed in Canada was from a legal (licensed medical and non-medical) source, an increase from 22% in the fourth quarter of 2018, when legalization was implemented.

Note to readers

Additional information:

- [Cannabis research and data](#)
- [Cannabis in Canada](#)
- [Legislative Review of the Cannabis Act: What We Heard Report](#)

The product "[Research to Insights: Cannabis in Canada](#)" is now available as part of *A Presentation Series from Statistics Canada About the Economy, Environment and Society (11-631-X)*.

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; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).