



Cannabis Legalization Observations 2021–2022: Key Findings for Public Health

Key Points

- Research shows movement toward the intended objectives of the *Cannabis Act* but there are still areas that require more research in a postpandemic context as the market continues to evolve and stabilize.
- The public health sector should monitor the potential public health implications of:
 - The increase in cannabis vaping, particularly among youth and young adults;
 - The growing demand for edibles and extracts; and
 - The increase in cannabis-related emergency department visits and admissions to intensive care units since legalization.
- The *Cannabis Legalization: 2021–22 Observations Report* includes key findings to shape future directions for cannabis-related research, policy development and public education.

Background

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (2022) published the *Cannabis Legalization: 2021–2022 Observations* report to provide an update on the implementation and effects of cannabis legalization in Canada. The report summarizes the effects according to the act's objectives and is intended as a resource for researchers, analysts and interested members of the public. This topic summary draws on the report to identify key findings that are relevant for the public health sector and those who support the health and well-being of people living in Canada.

Cannabis Act Legislative Review

The *Cannabis Act* requires the Minister of Health to review the effects of the act and its administration three years after coming into force. The review is in progress and will examine the effects on public health, mental health, health and consumption patterns of young people, Indigenous people and communities, and home cultivation.

Speaking about the effects is complicated by the difficulty in untangling the extent to which effects observed after March 2020 are linked with legalization in 2018 or the COVID-19 pandemic. Close monitoring of the public health, public safety and broader social effects of legalization are essential to minimizing harms and maximizing benefits.



Key Findings Affecting Public Health

- Despite some month-to-month fluctuation, the legal retail cannabis market continues to grow and remains years away from stability, particularly with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Overall, the percentage of people in Canada reporting cannabis use decreased from 2020 to 2021. However, more youth than adults who use cannabis reported changing their patterns of use during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Dried cannabis remains dominant, with edibles experiencing the most rapid increase in units sold, closely followed by extracts.
- Cannabis vaping has increased, with higher rates among youth and young adults. Health Canada’s recent consultation on regulatory amendments to limit the use of flavours in cannabis extracts may provide an opportunity to reduce the appeal of vaping, particularly for youth.
- Research shows an increase in cannabis-related emergency department visits and admissions to the intensive care unit since legalization, in some cases for children (those under the age of 18 years). More recent data show significant increases in emergency department visits and hospitalizations for children after the introduction of edibles to the legal market. This highlights the importance of ongoing public education on potential health risks and safe product storage.
- Overall, self-reported driving after cannabis use has remained unchanged with legalization and the COVID-19 pandemic. However, no roadside surveys have been conducted in the provinces or territories since cannabis legalization, limiting comparisons to prelegalization data.

Reference

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (2022). *Cannabis legalization: 2021–2022 observations*. Ottawa, Ont.: Author. <https://www.ccsa.ca/cannabis-legalization-2021-2022-observations-policy-brief>

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