

CANNABIS CONVERSATIONS

FINDINGS FROM A COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH PROJECT

BACKGROUND

With the legalization of cannabis, there is a need for effective, evidence-based tools to assist helping professionals in talking about cannabis with patients and service users. In 2018, the Peterborough Drug Strategy (PDS) launched the Peterborough Community Cannabis Project (PCCP) to help address this need locally. Through a phone survey and focus groups, residents of the City and County of Peterborough were asked about their views, use, and knowledge of health promotion information and campaigns related to cannabis. This research brief captures the results of these activities.

HOW WAS THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED?

Phone Survey: We conducted a randomized telephone survey of 800 City of Peterborough residents aged 18 years and older. The margin of error for the total N=800 sample is $\pm 3.5\%$ at the 95% confidence interval.

Focus Groups: We hosted 6 focus groups with 23 individuals who use cannabis. These groups included participants between the ages of 18 and 25, adults aged 55 and older, and people who use or have used cannabis while pregnant or breastfeeding.



WHAT DID WE LEARN?

PHONE SURVEY

Acceptance & Views

- 49% of individuals had a positive perception of cannabis use, while 29% had a negative perception.
- 35% believed cannabis is harmful, while 36% did not.

Use Prevalence

- 39% of participants reported using cannabis, while 52% reported having friends or family who use cannabis.
- 12% of survey participants reported using daily, while 9% report using it a few times a week.
- Over half of participants who identified as using cannabis prefer smoking to other modes of use.

Education & Awareness

- More than half of those surveyed believe that public education about cannabis needs improvement.
- 77% stated that they are aware of the negative effects of cannabis use, but over 30% could not name a specific harm.
- 78% had not heard of Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines (LRCUG).

Harm Reduction

- 53% reported being familiar with the concept of harm reduction, although 81% of all participants could not name a specific harm reduction strategy related to cannabis use.
- Over half of survey participants were unable to name a specific barrier to

someone adopting any one of the harm reduction strategies outlined in the LRCUG.

Promotion

- Online sources and social media are the most popular ways to access public health information. Newspapers, mail, and primary health care providers are the next preferred sources.

FOCUS GROUPS

- Most people who use cannabis reported their use as being both medicinal and recreational.
- Participants had very little previous awareness of Canada's LRCUG, although current information about the health risks of cannabis was viewed as mostly accessible and reliable.
- Associating all cannabis use with harm was considered judgmental and off-putting, especially when introducing the topic of cannabis-related health concerns.
- Some people who used cannabis while pregnant and breastfeeding challenged the validity of the evidence that states there are negative health consequences for their child and expressed experiences of stigma make it hard to find support.
- Switching from smoking cannabis to vaping, consuming edibles, or using

tinctures was identified as the most achievable area for behaviour change.

- There was significant interest in the health benefits of cannabis, including its potential to mitigate other harmful behaviours or substance use.
- Older adults wanted to learn about how cannabis interacts with prescribed medications.
- There was a strong desire for more information about the different cannabis products and varieties available.
- Transparent and accessible education was identified as a priority, especially for youth.



CONCLUSIONS

There is a strong desire from Peterborough residents for education from health care providers about their individual health as it relates to cannabis use. While most people surveyed expressed interest in learning about best practices for cannabis use concerning their health, it is evident that abstinence-focused approaches will most likely fail to engage most cannabis users. Engaging the public with straightforward and evidence-based information that is presented without judgment offers the most potential for sustaining conversations that seek to advance health and reduce the harms associated with cannabis use.

Find more cannabis resources at:
www.peterboroughdrugstrategy.com/cannabis

