



## Youth Education for Informed Choice Report

### **Marijuana is a serious health risk to teens, both when used casually and continuously.**

Presently, there is a narrative that cannabis is a benign drug with very few consequences. However, cannabis is a health risk both when used casually or continuously, because the pre-frontal cortex area of the adolescent brain is in the developmental stage. This makes our teens particularly susceptible to mental health issues including suicide ideation, psychosis, learning disabilities, a-motivational syndrome, and schizophrenia.

Research from the National Institute of Health shows that teenage marijuana users (aged 12-17) are twice as likely to develop use disorders (addiction) than those who use nicotine, alcohol, and in most categories, even prescription drugs misusers.

The risks of physical dependence, addiction, and other negative consequences increase with exposure to high concentrations of THC, and the younger the age at which substance use begins. Higher doses of THC are more likely to produce anxiety, agitation, paranoia, and psychosis. In addition, chronic users of marijuana with a high THC content are at risk for developing a condition known as cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome, which is marked by severe cycles of nausea and vomiting.

The risk for such psychotic disorders increases with frequency of use, potency of product, and as the age at first use decreases. Furthermore, frequent marijuana use during adolescence is associated with deficits in attention, memory, decision-making, and motivation; impaired learning, including declines in IQ which affects school performance. This jeopardizes professional and social achievements, and increases the rate of school absence and dropout; contributes to decreased life satisfaction overall; and adolescents between the ages of 12-17 reporting frequent use of marijuana showed a 130% greater likelihood of misusing opioids.<sup>1</sup>

Unregulated drug toxicity is the leading cause of death in British Columbia for persons aged 10 to 59, accounting for more deaths than homicides, suicides, accidents and natural disease combined. The lives of at least 13,794 British Columbians have been lost to unregulated drugs since the public-health emergency was first declared in April 2016.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Surgeon General. (2021, August 13). *U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory: Marijuana Use & the Developing Brain*. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

<sup>2</sup> "More than 2,500 lives lost to toxic drugs in 2023" /[news.gov.bc.ca](https://news.gov.bc.ca/) /



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Senators in Oregon have voted to recriminalize possession and personal use laws, by a margin of 28-1 following a report by the Oregon Health Authority that unintentional opioid overdose deaths more than tripled between 2019 and 2022; and after the Centre for Disease Control analysis found that drug overdose deaths increased by 44% in Oregon between October 2022 and October 2023 (the largest increase in any state).<sup>3</sup>

Prevention programs in schools, workplaces and public spaces are critical to reversing these trends, and are needed now, to mitigate the risk of present and future harm. Failure to do so will result in further increasing the economic cost of productivity loss in the workplace due to illness and injury from substance use; joblessness, homeless, and the rising cost of medical services needed by people with substance dependency.

Substance use and abuse affects the mental and overall health of our children, their families, communities, and Canadian society as a whole.

### **The age at which teens are becoming addicted: suffering physical, mental, emotional harm and dying, is rapidly becoming younger.**

Higher average exposure to medical marijuana advertising is associated with higher average use, intentions to use, positive expectancies, and negative consequences. Results suggest that exposure to Medical Marijuana advertising may not only play a significant role in shaping attitudes about marijuana, but may also contribute to increased marijuana use and related negative consequences throughout adolescence.<sup>4</sup>

Cannabis vaping is increasing as the most popular method of cannabis delivery among all adolescents in the US. Frequency of cannabis vaping among adolescents from all demographic groups is reported at six or more times per month, and rising faster than occasional use. Those who vape and smoke nicotine are more than 40 times more likely to also vape and smoke cannabis.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Here's Why Oregon Is Walking Back Its Drug Decriminalization Law", James Farrell, Forbes, April 2, 2024

<sup>4</sup> "Planting the seed for marijuana use: Changes in exposure to medical marijuana advertising and subsequent adolescent marijuana use, cognitions, and consequences over seven years." E. J. D'Amico, A. Rodriguez, J. S. Tucker, E. R. Pedersen, R. A. Shih; Drug and Alcohol Dependence Volume 188, 1 July 2018, Pages 385-391 *extracted from [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com) 6 April 2024*

<sup>5</sup> "Major Uptick Reported in Cannabis Vaping for All Adolescents" N. Kreski, H. Ankrum, D. Hasin, S. Martins, M. Olfson, and Q. Chen. published by: Columbia University Irving Medical Centre, Millman School of Public Health, 19 May, 2022



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“Rising concerns about cannabis vaping is important public health information for prevention.” said Katherine Keyes, PhD, professor of epidemiology at Columbia Millman School. “In terms of safety, and potential for transition to cannabis use disorder especially at frequent levels of use, these results indicate a necessity for public health intervention and increased regulation.”

Substance use experimentation among young teens is directly attributable to the social acceptability which follows legalization and the decriminalization of other harmful drugs.

The number of emergency room visits for cannabis poisoning has risen sharply among people ages 65 and older. Poisonings doubled after Canada legalized the sale of the cannabis flower, and then tripled just 15 months later, when Canada legalized the sale of edibles.<sup>6</sup>

Because smoking cannabis and cannabis edibles are suggested as being harmless and promoted to suggest healthful benefits, intergenerational substance use that now ranges from seniors to young adults, has become socially acceptable in British Columbia. Older siblings, parents and grandparents remain the most influential role models for normative behaviour for younger children, and thus the risk increases as youth imitate the social habits learned in the home.

Today, cannabis tops alcohol as Americans’ daily drug of choice. A new study shows that a growing number of people are regularly using cannabis. This is of grave concern for young teens because in 1995, the concentration of THC in cannabis samples seized by the Drug Enforcement Administration was about 4 percent. By 2021, it was about 15 percent. And now cannabis manufacturers are extracting THC to make oils, edibles, wax, sugar-size crystals and glass-like products called shatter with THC levels that can exceed 95 percent.<sup>7</sup>

A local grade school teacher has commented that her seven and eight year old students are now coming to school with the smell of marijuana on their clothing, leading to the conclusion that the risk of irreversible damage to the health of our children is not only real, but alarmingly apparent.

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<sup>6</sup> “Legalized Weed Is Landing More Seniors in the E.R.” Globe and Mail, May 2024

<sup>7</sup> New York Times, May 2024



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### **The economic cost of substance abuse is increasing dramatically.**

Before legalization, and the subsequent 86.6% rise in marijuana use during the Covid 19 Pandemic, the cost of illness and injury due to substance use to the Canadian economy increased 11.8% over the previous 5 year period:<sup>8</sup>

- 2015 - \$43.5 billion
- 2017 - \$46 billion
- 2020 - \$49.1 billion

Three years after California legalized marijuana (in 2016), emergency room visits for cannabis induced psychosis went up 54% across the state, from 682 visits to 1,053. Additionally, after legalization in Colorado, calls to the Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Center increased more than five-fold, from 45 to 238, between 2006 and 2014, and the rate of marijuana related emergency department visits increased by 67% from 153 to 256 per 100,000 visits.<sup>9</sup>

The overall cost of substance use to the Canadian economy was \$49.1 billion in 2020. Productivity losses were \$22.4 billion or 45.6% of the total costs, while healthcare costs were \$13.4 billion or 27.3%. The third-highest contributor to the total costs related to substance use were criminal justice costs, which were \$10.0 billion or 20.3% of the total.

Substance use and abuse was responsible for 73,994 deaths in 2020 — the equivalent of more than 200 lives lost each day. Tobacco use was responsible for nearly two in three lives lost (46,366 in 2020). While alcohol and opioid use led to far fewer deaths (17,098 and 6,491 in 2020, respectively), total lost productivity costs attributable to these substances are within range of tobacco. This is because many people dying from alcohol and opioid use are younger, resulting in more lost years of productive life. In fact, opioid use led to the most lost years of productive life of any substance for the first time in 2020.<sup>10</sup>

Today, a construction worker is 16 times more likely to die of an overdose on the job than a work related injury.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cdn Centre on Substance Use

<sup>9</sup> Dembosky, A. (2022, June 7). Cases of Cannabis-Induced Psychosis Rise. *Lawmakers Want to Add Mental Health Warnings to Pot Products*.

<sup>10</sup> *Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms 2007 - 2020*; Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction; University of Victoria

*"Construction Industry Grapples with It's Top Killer: Drug Overdose."* <sup>11</sup> J. Edward Marenco, NYT, 5 April, 2024



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### **Effective prevention programs and measures must be implemented now.**

“As cannabis legalization continues... and as products, delivery systems, potency, and marketing proliferate within a for-profit industry, increased attention to youth trends, including investment in sustained and evidence-based prevention and intervention, is increasingly urgent.”<sup>12</sup>

Decriminalization of drugs possession makes it not only possible, but relatively easy for deadly substances like fentanyl, to be blended with marijuana, causing immediate overdoses to young people who have been led to believe that smoking cannabis is a safe recreational pastime.

“It is the Chinese Communist Party that is actively driving this crisis, as the House committee recently [revealed in a bipartisan report](#). The Chinese government subsidizes the export of illicit narcotics that are illegal to produce under Chinese law. It gives government grants to drug traffickers. Chinese state-owned enterprises openly facilitate the export of illicit narcotics bound for the U.S.

Even as China claims to cooperate with us to stem the flow of fentanyl and its ingredients today, its chemical manufacturers are already moving on to the next phase of the crisis — nitazenes and xylazine, which can be more potent and less responsive to Narcan.

Fentanyl and other illicit narcotics are killing more North Americans each year than were killed in the bloodiest year of World War II. Until we address the root cause of the supply-driven crisis — the Chinese Communist Party actively addicting and killing North Americans — we will not stop this deadly epidemic. We have tried talking. It’s time to act.”<sup>13</sup>

These findings point to the very real possibility that fentanyl and other illicit drugs exports bound for Vancouver are done so with the clear intent of crippling and destabilizing the North American economy. At the present rate at which the drugs epidemic is escalating, such overt actions have every chance of succeeding.

Today there is an urgent need to create and implement effective youth and families’ substance use education and prevention programs to mitigate harm to the children we are entrusted to protect.

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<sup>12</sup> “Major Uptick Reported in Cannabis Vaping for All Adolescents” N. Kreski, H. Ankrum, D. Hasin, S. Martins, M. Olsson, and Q. Chen. published by: Columbia University Irving Medical Centre, Millman School of Public Health, 19 May, 2022

<sup>13</sup> John Moolenaar, Caledonia, Michigan Chairman of the House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party; letter to the NYT, 1 June 2024.



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Educating youth, families and teachers about the potential emotional, mental and physical health risks of substance use will lay the groundwork for the prevention of the unintended consequences that come with substance use. Empowering our youth to make good decisions about their present and future health is a proven measure towards ensuring the economic stability of Canada for future generations.

Research confirms that participation in effective prevention programs can cut drug use in half. These reductions (in both the prevalence and incidence), are primarily with respect to tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use. And, prevention programs are successful in reducing or preventing the number of individuals who abuse alcohol and drugs, contributing to reductions in later delinquency.<sup>14</sup>

Healthy families contribute to the strong and vibrant labour force needed to ensure a thriving Canadian economy for generations to come. Substance use prevention and education programs that help young people to make an informed choice, help parents know how to talk to their children, and include information about alternatives to substance use, offer the best chance for a future filled with hope so that all Canadian families can enjoy a healthy quality of life in vibrant communities.

“The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The second best time is now.”

Japanese Proverb

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<sup>14</sup> Public Safety Canada Report 1995