

New Study Shows Medical Cannabis Use Among 1 in 6 Americans

A survey conducted by researchers at UCLA found that one out of six primary care patients use cannabis, with many citing medical reasons. Published in JAMA Open Network, the study revealed that a third of these consumers are at moderate or high risk of cannabis use disorder.

Medical Cannabis Use

The survey indicated that many who use cannabis recreationally also do so for medicinal purposes. This highlights the need for routine cannabis screenings in primary care settings, a practice currently rare in healthcare systems.

Screening and Data Collection

In response to the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force's 2020 recommendation, UCLA Health implemented a self-administered survey on cannabis use. Data collected from 176,000 patients between January 2021 and May 2023 showed that 17% were cannabis users.

Usage Patterns

Among cannabis users, 47% used it for medical purposes. Common reasons included mental health management (56%), sleep (56%), and pain relief (37%). Notably, even those who used cannabis recreationally often did so to manage symptoms.

Study Limitations and Recommendations

The study, while insightful, relied on self-reported data and faced potential underreporting due to stigma. Researchers advocate for routine cannabis use screenings to better document and understand medical cannabis usage.

Expert Opinions

Dr. Benjamin Caplan emphasized the importance of integrating cannabis discussions into routine care. He stressed the need for doctors to understand patients' reasons for choosing cannabis, which could lead to improved management strategies and support systems for both medical and non-medical cannabis users.