

Cannabis Use Among Older Adults in the US Hits Record High

Marijuana Use Among Older Adults in the United States Hits Unprecedented Levels With 7 Percent Reporting Past-Month Use

Marijuana consumption among adults aged 65 and older in the United States has reached an all-time high, according to new research conducted by the Center for Drug Use and HIV/HCV Research (CDUHR) at the NYU School of Global Public Health. The study reveals that 7 percent of older adults reported using cannabis within the past month—a significant increase from previous years. This trend underscores a growing shift in cannabis use demographics, with more older adults embracing the substance in recent years.

Demographic and Socioeconomic Shifts Mark Significant Changes in Cannabis Use Among Older Adults

The profile of older cannabis users has changed markedly. The research shows a pronounced rise in cannabis use among older adults who are college-educated, married, female, and have higher incomes. This contrasts with earlier patterns where cannabis use was more common among younger demographics. These findings indicate that cannabis consumption is no longer limited to traditional user groups but is increasingly prevalent among diverse segments of the older adult population.

Analysis Based on National Survey Data Highlights Growth in Monthly Cannabis Use From 2021 to 2023

Researchers examined data collected from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health conducted between 2021 and 2023, focusing specifically on individuals aged 65 and older. The survey asked respondents about their cannabis use within the past month, a measure defined as “current” use. This data allowed the research team to observe trends more precisely than past studies, which previously focused on past-year use due to smaller sample sizes for current users in this age group.

The findings revealed that current cannabis use among older adults rose from 4.8 percent in 2021 to 7 percent in 2023, representing a nearly 46 percent increase in just two years. When compared to data from 2006 and 2007, when less than 1 percent of older adults reported past-year cannabis use, this represents a dramatic shift in consumption patterns.

Older Adults With Higher Education, Income, and Marital Status Show Sharper Increases in Cannabis Use

Certain subgroups of older adults showed especially sharp increases in cannabis use during the study period. Individuals who were married, white, held college degrees, and had annual incomes of \$75,000 or more demonstrated the most significant upticks. While older men continue to use cannabis at higher rates than

older women, the latter group experienced a notably steep rise in usage.

This change points to evolving social attitudes and increased accessibility of cannabis products among older populations, particularly those with greater financial means and educational backgrounds.

States With Medical Cannabis Legalization See Higher Cannabis Use Among Older Adults

The study also highlights a geographical dimension to cannabis use trends, noting that older adults living in states with legalized medical marijuana showed significantly higher rates of cannabis consumption than those residing in states without such laws. Increased availability and shifting social acceptance of cannabis in these states likely contribute to these differences.

Interestingly, the study observed that in 2021, the highest-income group had the lowest cannabis use prevalence, but by 2023, this group reported the highest rates of cannabis use, suggesting that income plays a critical role in accessing medical cannabis given its associated costs.

Older Adults With Chronic Conditions Show Increased Cannabis Use, Raising Medical Considerations

Among the study's most notable findings is the rise in cannabis use among older adults suffering from chronic diseases. Those with heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, cancer, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) were more likely to report cannabis use, especially individuals managing multiple chronic conditions simultaneously.

This trend reflects a growing interest among older adults in using cannabis for symptom relief and chronic condition management. However, it also raises important medical concerns regarding the interactions between cannabis and existing medications or disease processes, highlighting the need for careful clinical guidance.

Medical Experts Urge Screening and Education on Cannabis Use for Older Patients

The research authors emphasize the importance of clinicians screening older patients for cannabis use and providing education about potential risks. Aging affects physiological responses to psychoactive substances, meaning that cannabis use could have different or heightened effects on older adults compared to younger individuals.

As cannabis becomes more common among older populations, healthcare providers are encouraged to incorporate discussions about cannabis into routine care, considering both therapeutic benefits and possible complications, particularly for those with chronic illnesses.

Study Represents Collaboration Between Leading Academic Institutions and Is Funded by National Institutes of Health

This study was led by researchers from NYU School of Global Public Health and the University of California San Diego, with support from the National Institute on Drug Abuse and other institutional funding bodies. The collaborative effort underscores the growing scientific interest in understanding cannabis use trends and their implications for public health, especially in aging populations.

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