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Overview of Ottawa Public Health's Randomized-Telephone Survey Results

In December 2017, Ottawa Public Health (OPH) commissioned a randomized-telephone survey of approximately 400 Ottawa residents to gain a greater understanding of their knowledge and perceptions of the effects of cannabis use. This is an overview of the survey findings.

Reported Behaviour

- Just over half (54%) of Ottawa residents aged 18 and over have consumed cannabis at some point in their life.
- Nearly one in five Ottawa residents (19%) have consumed cannabis within the past 12 months.

Potential Use Following Legalization

- Eighty-six per cent (86%) of those who had not consumed cannabis in the past 12 months said they would be unlikely to consume following legalization. However, 13% said they would be at least moderately likely to try cannabis if it were legal.

Perceptions of Social Acceptability

- Those who had used cannabis in the past 12 months were more likely to respond that cannabis use was socially acceptable (79%).
- Only about a third (36%) of those who had never used cannabis indicated that it was socially acceptable.

Perceived Harm for Different Groups

- Ottawa residents, regardless of past use, indicated that occasional cannabis use was harmful to youth aged 13 to 18 (91%).
- Those who have used cannabis in the past 12 months were slightly less likely to think occasional cannabis use was harmful to pregnant women or breastfeeding mothers than those who had not used in the past 12 months or had never used (75% versus 91%).

- Past year cannabis users were less likely to agree that occasional cannabis use was harmful for 19 to 24 year olds (32%) or those over 24 years old (13%) compared to those who had used, but not in the past 12 months (63% and 50%) and those who had never used cannabis (81% and 65%).

Awareness of Risks

- In general, those who used cannabis in the past 12 months had different opinions on risk factors than those who had used, but not in the past 12 months or those who had never used at all.

Risk with Method of Consumption

- Nearly two-thirds of those who had used cannabis in the past 12 months indicated that the effects are felt more quickly when smoked compared to when eaten. This drops to 43% among those who have used cannabis but not in the past 12 months. A slight majority of those who have never used cannabis (58%) were not sure.

Risk of Second-hand Smoke

- Those who had used cannabis in the past 12 months were less likely to agree that second hand smoke from cannabis has similar health harms to cigarette smoke (39%) compared to those who had used in the past but not in the past 12 months (64%) and those who have never used (65%).

Risk from Smoking

- Those who had used in the past 12 months were also much more likely to agree that smoking cigarettes was more harmful than smoking cannabis (84%) compared to those who had used in the past but not in the past 12 months (62%) and those who have never used (42%).

Risk for Dependence

- Just over half (51%) of those who had used cannabis in the past responded that cannabis used during the teen-age years would likely increase the risk of dependence compared to 63% who had used but not in the past 12 months and 84% of those who had never used.

Risk of Impaired Driving

- Ninety percent of Ottawa residents responded that using cannabis impairs one's ability to drive or operate a vehicle. Agreement did not vary markedly by history of use.

Topics for Interest for Education

- Just over half of Ottawa residents identify the effects of cannabis on driving as a topic of interest for information. Other topics of interest for about half of residents include: health risks for youth and adults, effects of combining cannabis with other drugs, physical and psychological effects, and risk of addiction.

Discussions with Parents

- Four in five parents have discussed cannabis use with their teenagers. Some primary discussion areas include health, safety, and social risks; health issues and the effects of cannabis on the body; and the addictive nature of cannabis.