

# Young Adult Health Survey | MARIJUANA

*Center for Study of Health and Risk Behaviors at the University of Washington, in collaboration with the Department of Social and Health Services and the Washington State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup*

## Young adults and marijuana: Use, sources, and perception of risk

Voter Initiative 502 (I-502) legalized adult recreational marijuana (cannabis) use starting in January 2013.<sup>i</sup> Long-term epidemiological studies consistently show that substance use peaks during the young adult years (ages 18-25).<sup>ii, iii</sup> Thus, to study the impacts of this major policy change a critical need arose to gather more information on young adult consumption patterns and attitudes. Currently available information on this topic is typically limited to surveys conducted with college students. In order to learn more about marijuana use among a broader population of young adults in Washington, an internet-based survey was conducted from May through early July of 2014. During the period of the survey marijuana use by adults had been legal for more than a year, but retail sale of marijuana did not begin until the summer of 2014. The survey was completed by 2,101 Washington residents aged 18-25, from all ethnic groups and 34 of Washington’s 39 counties. NOTE: The results presented in this report are *weighted* to reflect the demographic and geographic characteristics of Washington’s population.

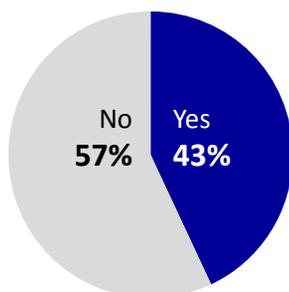
### Key Findings

- Almost half (43%) of young adults in the survey reported they used marijuana for recreational purposes during the past year, and 15% used marijuana for medical purposes.
- The most commonly reported source of marijuana for young adults was friends, with 70% of those who used marijuana reporting friends as their source of marijuana in the past 30 days.
- Almost half of the respondents who used marijuana during the previous 30 days reported that they had driven within three hours, and 16% “drove under the influence” six or more times.
- Young adults perceived greater physical and psychological risk from binge drinking than from regular marijuana use, and were more likely to perceive no risk from regular marijuana use.
- Young adults greatly underestimated the proportion of their peers who do NOT use marijuana, and overestimated the proportion of their peers who DO use marijuana.

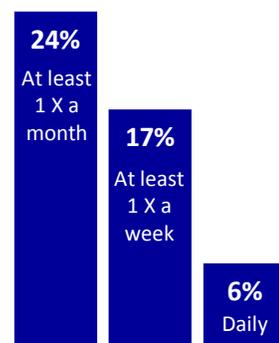
## Past Year Frequency of Marijuana Use

### RECREATIONAL USE

*Used marijuana for recreational purposes in the past year?*

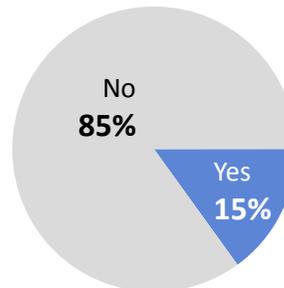


*How often?*



### MEDICAL USE

*Used marijuana for medical purposes in the past year?*



*How often?*

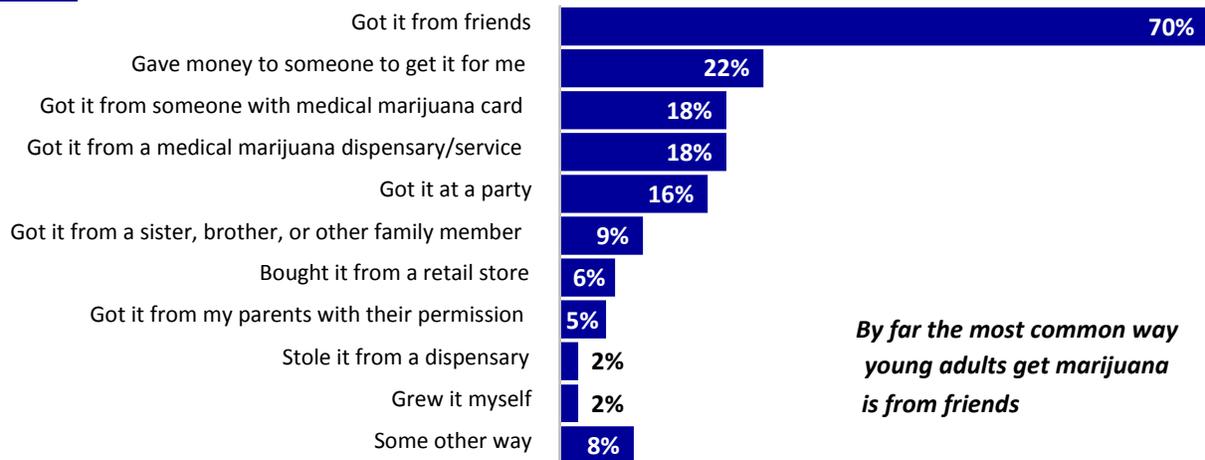


## Where young adults (18-25) get marijuana

For some years high school students have reported on the Healthy Youth Survey<sup>iv</sup> in Washington State that it is easy to get marijuana, so we hypothesized that the same would be true for young adults. For the purpose of prevention service planning, it is useful to know how young adults are obtaining marijuana: through medical dispensaries or other sources.

In this survey of young adults, almost 70% reported they obtained marijuana from friends, and only around 18% got it directly from a marijuana dispensary, with another 18% saying they got it from someone with a medical marijuana card.

### **Q.** *In the past 30 days, what were your sources for marijuana?*



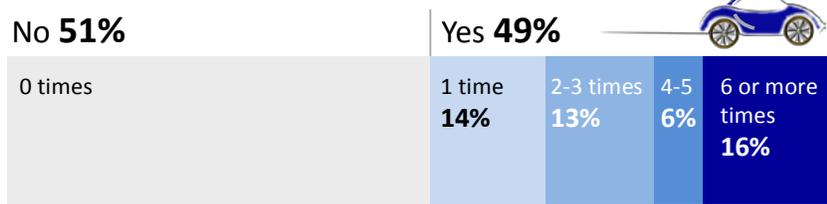
## Driving Under the Influence of Marijuana

Partly due to the limited research available,<sup>v</sup> the Washington Legislature’s struggle to adopt rules for driving under the influence of marijuana was controversial, finally settling on a per se guideline. Current evidence suggests that it takes around three hours for the behavioral effects of consuming edible marijuana to dissipate. For this reason, the question in the survey stipulates “driving within three hours” of using marijuana.

Almost half of the respondents who used marijuana during the previous 30 days reported that they had driven within three hours, and 16% “drove under the influence” six or more times. The next round of surveys will include questions to explore the simultaneous use of marijuana and alcohol, and driving under the influence of both.

### **Q.** *During the past 30 days, how many times did you drive a car or other vehicle within three hours after using cannabis?*

*Among the young adults who have used marijuana in the past month, almost half report they have driven a car within three hours of using marijuana*



## Perception of the Risk of Harm from Marijuana and Alcohol Use

The national Monitoring the Future study surveys youth and young adults about substance use and attitudes about and perceptions related to substance use. The researchers who implement that survey have observed that perceptions about the harm of using specific substances, including marijuana and alcohol, predict changes in use. In their 2013 report, they wrote:

*“As more states adopt decriminalization or full legalization..., it seems quite possible that attitudes about and use of marijuana will change. Declines in perceived risk and disapproval of marijuana would seem the most likely attitudinal changes, and such changes may well lead to increased use among youth.”<sup>vi</sup>*

In Washington, the Healthy Youth Survey has been tracking changes in attitudes about marijuana and alcohol among adolescents since 1995, but historically no parallel information has been available about young adults. As expected, reported attitudes are reflected in reported use by young adults. Additionally, young adults perceive more risk of physical and psychological harm from binge drinking than from regular marijuana use, and are more likely to report no risk from regular marijuana use.

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**Young adults perceived greater physical and psychological risk from binge drinking than from regular marijuana use.**

### BINGE DRINKING ON A WEEKEND

Perceived Risk of Physical Harm



Perceived Risk of Psychological Harm

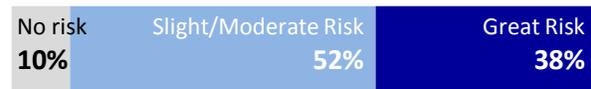


### REGULAR CANNABIS USE

Perceived Risk of Physical Harm



Perceived Risk of Psychological Harm

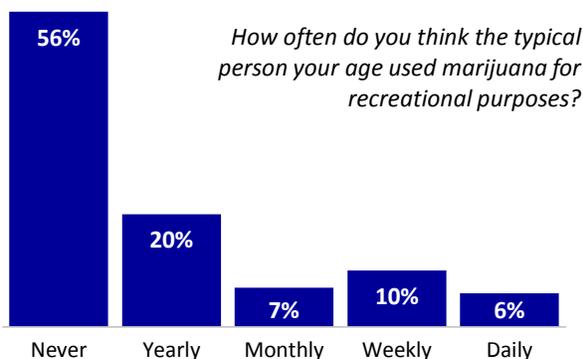


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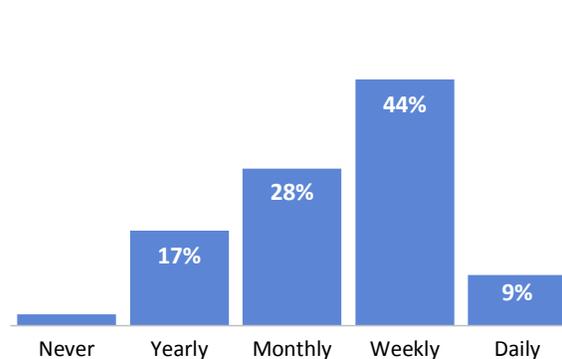
**Young adults greatly underestimated the proportion of their peers who do NOT use marijuana, and overestimated the proportion of their peers who DO use marijuana.**

Although 56% of young adults don't use marijuana, only a small number of survey respondents answered "never" to the question about a "typical person your age". This misperception of the norm can impact a person's own choices—that is, a non-user may think that it is "normal" to use marijuana.

### ACTUAL USE



### PERCEIVED USE BY SAME AGE GROUP



## Methodology for the Young Adult Health Survey

As much as possible, questions were selected from other surveys so that marijuana use among the young adults in Washington can be compared to high school students in Washington and young adults in state and national surveys.

Participants were recruited using a combination of direct mail advertising to a random sample of 18-25 year olds registered with the Department of Licensing, and online advertising, including social media. Online recruitment strategies consisted of Facebook, Craigslist, and Amazon Mechanical Turk advertising, as well as a study website and Facebook Fan Page. Participation was confidential. Complex screening and validation strategies were used to prevent duplicate or false responses. Based on respondent demographics assessed on an ongoing basis throughout data collection, the recruiting strategies were modified to recruit respondents who were under-represented.

As the methodology was only partly based on a random sample design, it can best be considered a “convenience sample”. To improve the generalizability of the findings, the data were weighted to more accurately reflect the demographic and geographic diversity of the population, as well as the gender and student status. The weighted results closely mirror the un-weighted results. We report here only the weighted results.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Email: [uwwyahs@uw.edu](mailto:uwwyahs@uw.edu)  
Phone: 206-543-0080 extension 1



### FOR HELP

The website [HTTP://LearnAboutMarijuanaWA.org](http://LearnAboutMarijuanaWA.org), hosted by the University of Washington’s Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute, carries a wide selection of resources, from guidelines for parents to research briefs.

- i. Marijuana is only one of the three main forms in which cannabis is used. As the most common use of the word “marijuana” typically refers to all three types of cannabis, we adopt that usage in this paper, even though the more correct word, and the word used throughout the survey reported here, is “cannabis”.
- ii. Stone, Andrea L.; Becker, Linda G.; Huber, Alice M.; Catalano, Richard F. (2012) Review of risk and protective factors of substance use and problem use in emerging adulthood. *Addictive Behaviors* 37(2012): 747-775.
- iii. White, Helene Raskin; Jackson, Kristina. (2004-2005) Social and psychological influences on emerging adult drinking behavior. *Alcohol Research & Health* 28(4):182-190. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Accessed on 3/23/2015 at [HTTP://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh284/182-190.htm](http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh284/182-190.htm)
- iv. For reports, fact sheets, and findings from the Healthy Youth Survey, visit [www.AskHYS.net](http://www.AskHYS.net)
- v. For a brief review of research on marijuana and driving, see [HTTP://LearnAboutMarijuanaWA.org/factsheets/driving.htm](http://LearnAboutMarijuanaWA.org/factsheets/driving.htm)
- vi. Johnston, L. D.; O’Malley, P. M.; Bachman, J. G.; Schulenberg, J. E. (2013). Monitoring the Future national survey results on drug use, 1975–2012: Volume I, Secondary School Students (page 386). Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.