

Cannabis use patterns and lower risk consumption:

*Results from the U of A campus
experiences with cannabis survey*

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Overview

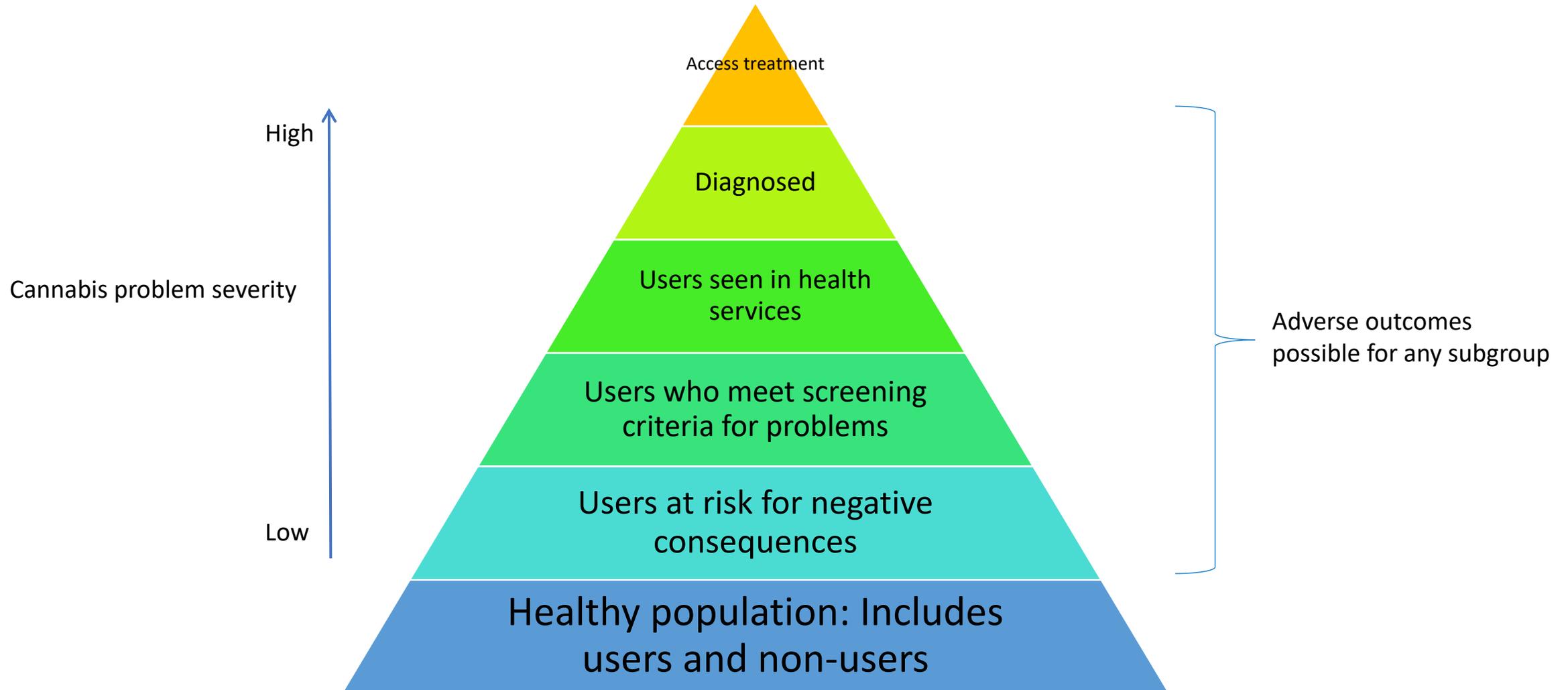
1. *U of A Campus Experiences With Cannabis Survey*
 - a. *Methods*
 - b. *Cannabis use and lower risk consumption practices*

2. *Toward effective secondary prevention*
 - a. *Are students who use cannabis interested in web-based supports?*
 - b. *Screening, Self-Management, and Referral to Treatment (SSMRT)*



**ANY
QUESTIONS?**

A population perspective on cannabis use





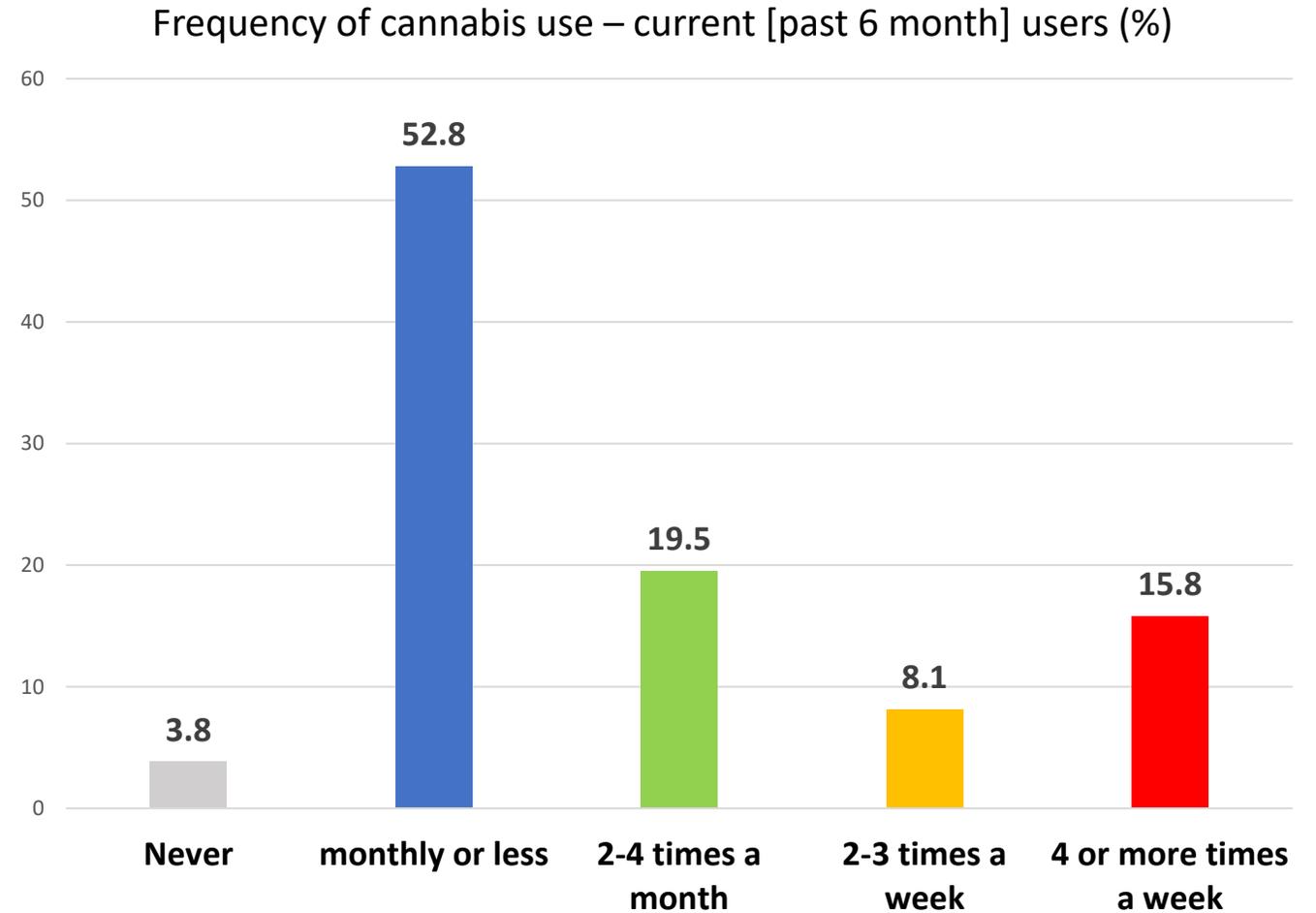
*U of A Campus Experiences
With Cannabis Survey*

Methods

- An engaged scholarship project and partnership with the U of A Dean of Students office
 - Beyond research data, the survey was designed to provide support for enhancing campus services and supports, to provide baseline cannabis use data, pre-legalization, and to assist in intervention development
- Online survey of 3,600 students, conducted in Spring, 2018
 - Participants compensated with \$5 credit on their One Card
- Measures included a comprehensive cannabis battery: **prevalence, cannabis problems, risk behaviours**, protective behavioural strategies, motives for use, **sociocultural cannabis norms**, support for campus cannabis policies, **interest in web-based supports**
 - Other measures: demographics, **other substance use** (WHO ASSIST), psychological distress, problem gambling, internet addiction test, personal well being

Prevalence of cannabis use (previous 6 months)

- Overall U of A estimate: 30.3%

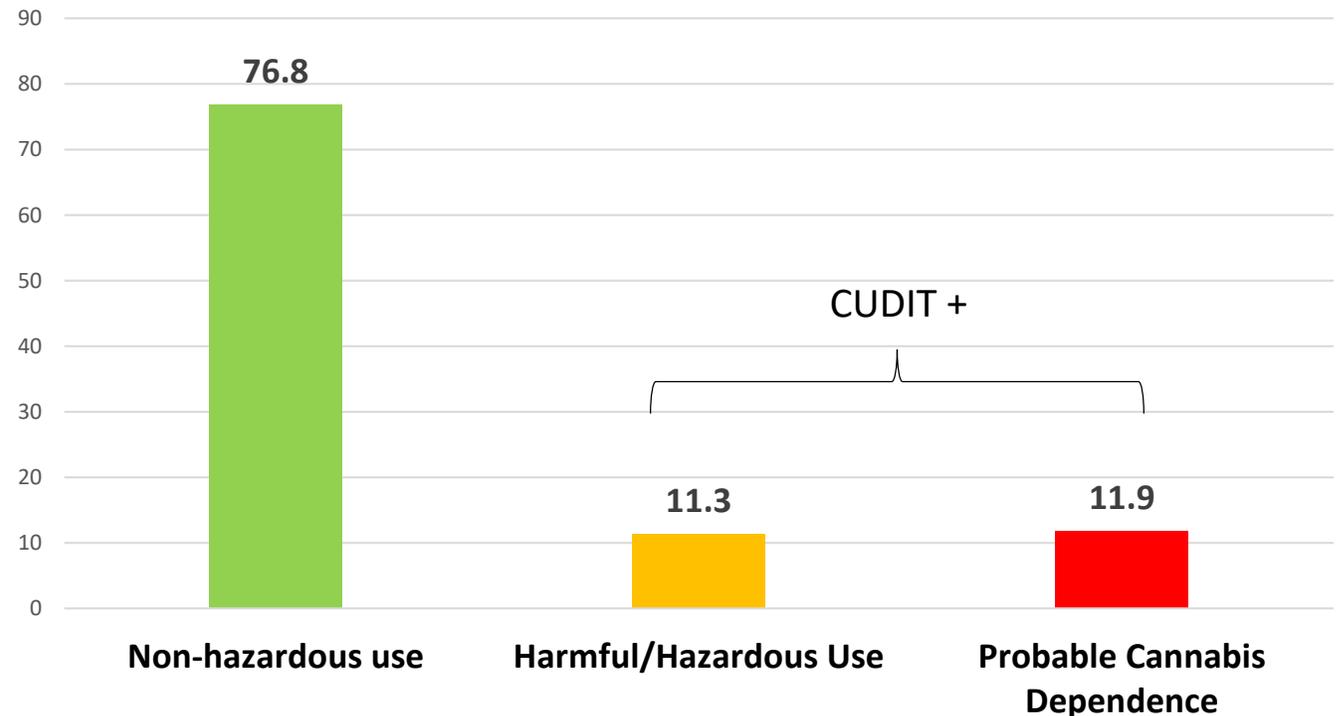


Prevalence of cannabis problems

Respondents reporting cannabis use in the previous 6 months were administered the Cannabis Use Disorder Identification Test – Revised (CUDIT-R)

- 8 items assessing patterns of use, dependence symptoms, problems
- Score range: 0 – 32
 - Non-hazardous use: 0 to 8
 - Harmful/hazardous use: 9 to 12
 - Probable cannabis dependence: 13+
- Overall estimate of problematic use *among current cannabis users* = 23.2%
- Overall U of A estimate of cannabis problems (*includes non-users and current cannabis users*) = 7.7%

Cannabis problems among current [past 6 month] users (%)



Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines (LRCUG)



Recommendations

- Cannabis use has health risks best avoided by abstaining
- Delay taking up cannabis use until later in life
- Identify and choose lower-risk cannabis products
- Don't use synthetic cannabinoids
- Avoid smoking burnt cannabis—choose safer ways of using
- If you smoke cannabis, avoid harmful smoking practices
- Limit and reduce how often you use cannabis
- Don't use and drive, or operate other machinery
- Avoid cannabis use altogether if you are at risk for mental health problems or are pregnant
- Avoid combining these risks

The LRCUG are an evidence-based intervention project by the Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse (CRISM).



Reference: *American Journal of Public Health*, 2017

The LRCUG have been endorsed by the following organizations:

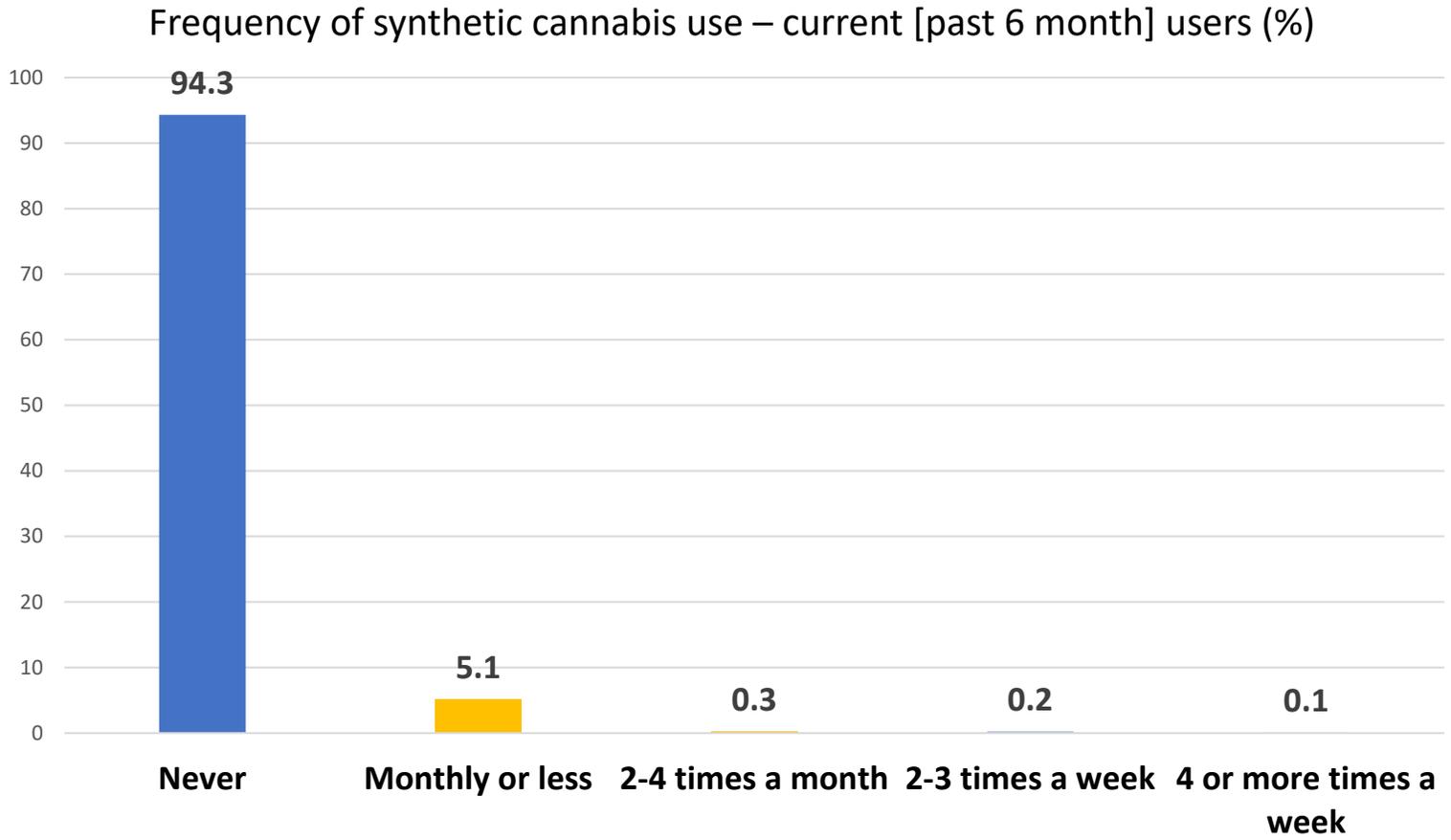


Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health (in principle)



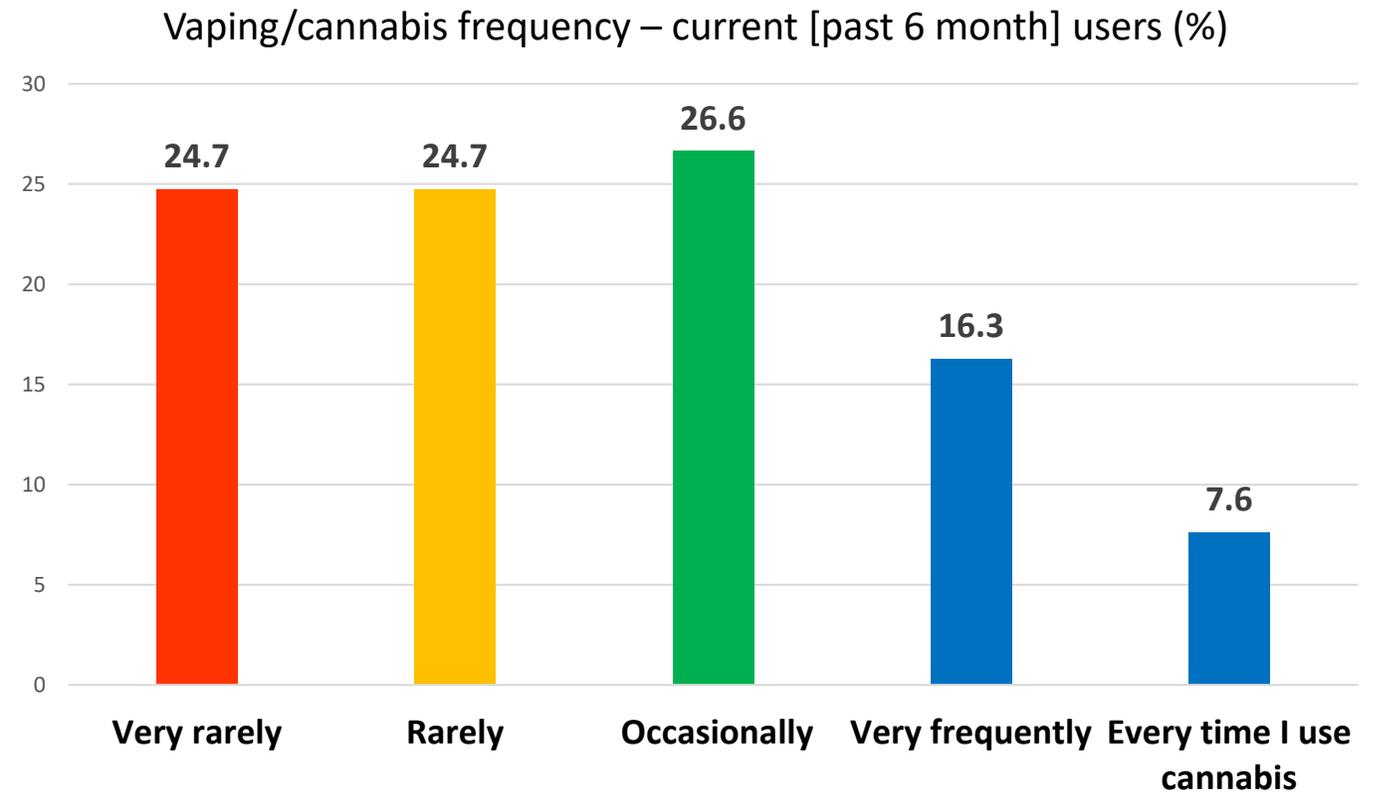
Synthetic cannabis use

- Overall U of A estimate among current users: 5.7%



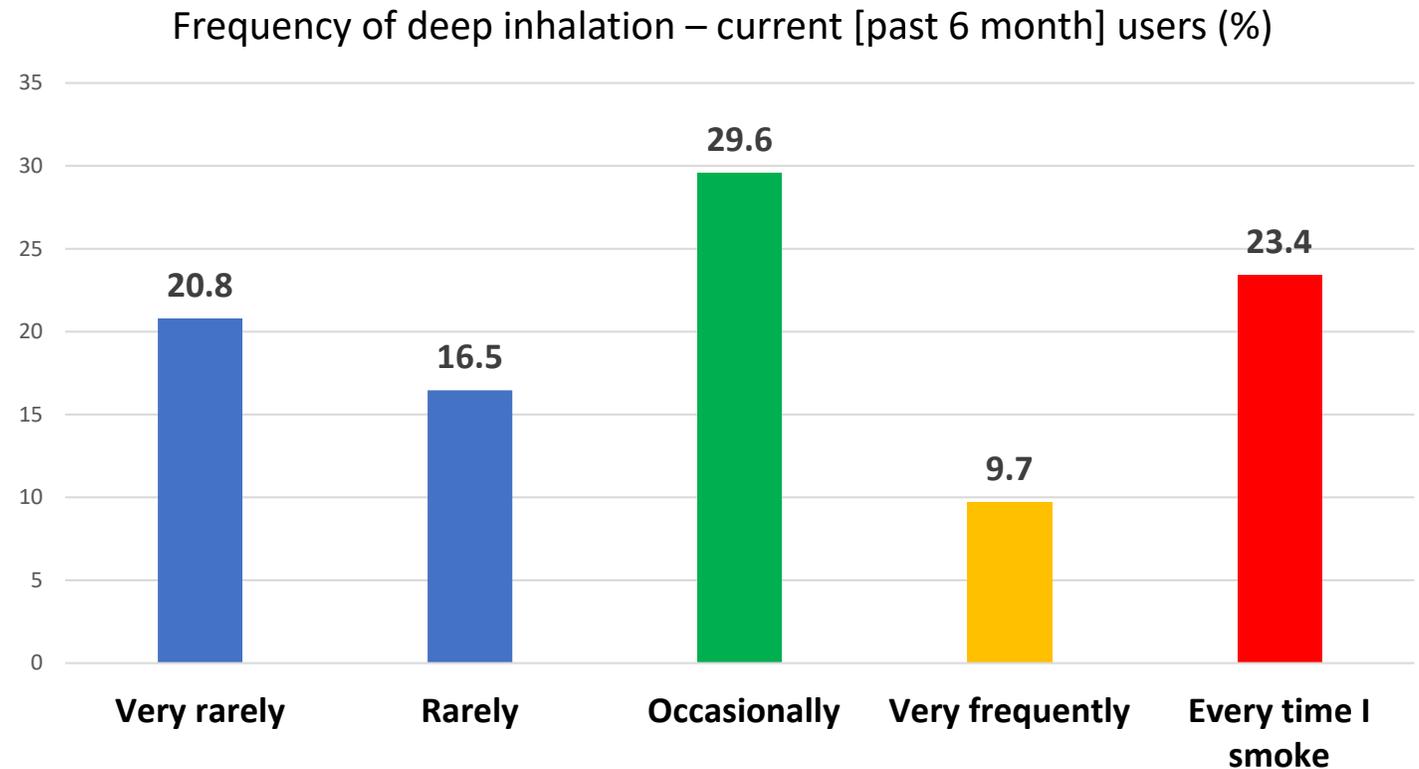
Vaping when using cannabis

- Overall U of A estimate among current users: 27.8%



Harmful smoking practices: Deep inhalation

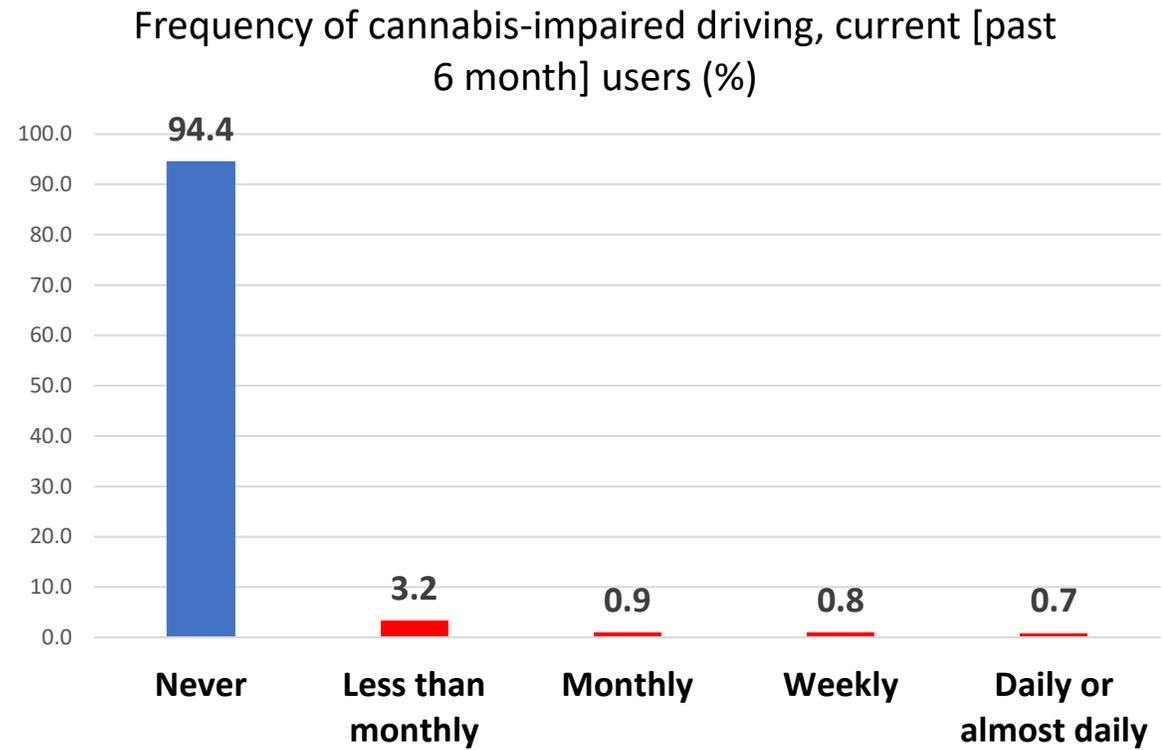
- Overall U of A estimate among current users: 25.3%





Driving under the influence of cannabis

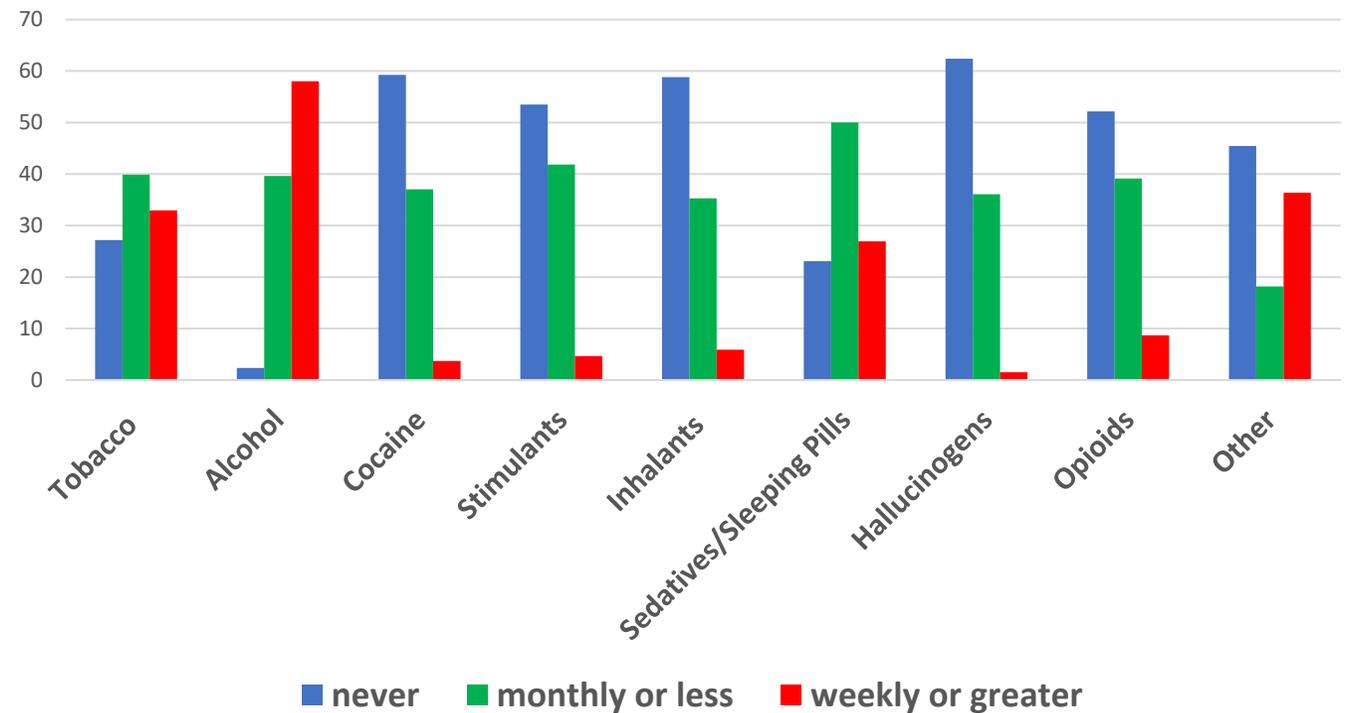
- Overall U of A estimate among current users: 5.6%



Co-occurring substance use among students with cannabis problems (CUDIT+)

- Recall: CUDIT+ = Harmful/hazardous users and those with probable cannabis dependence
- Graph presents ASSIST (Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test) scores for this sub-group

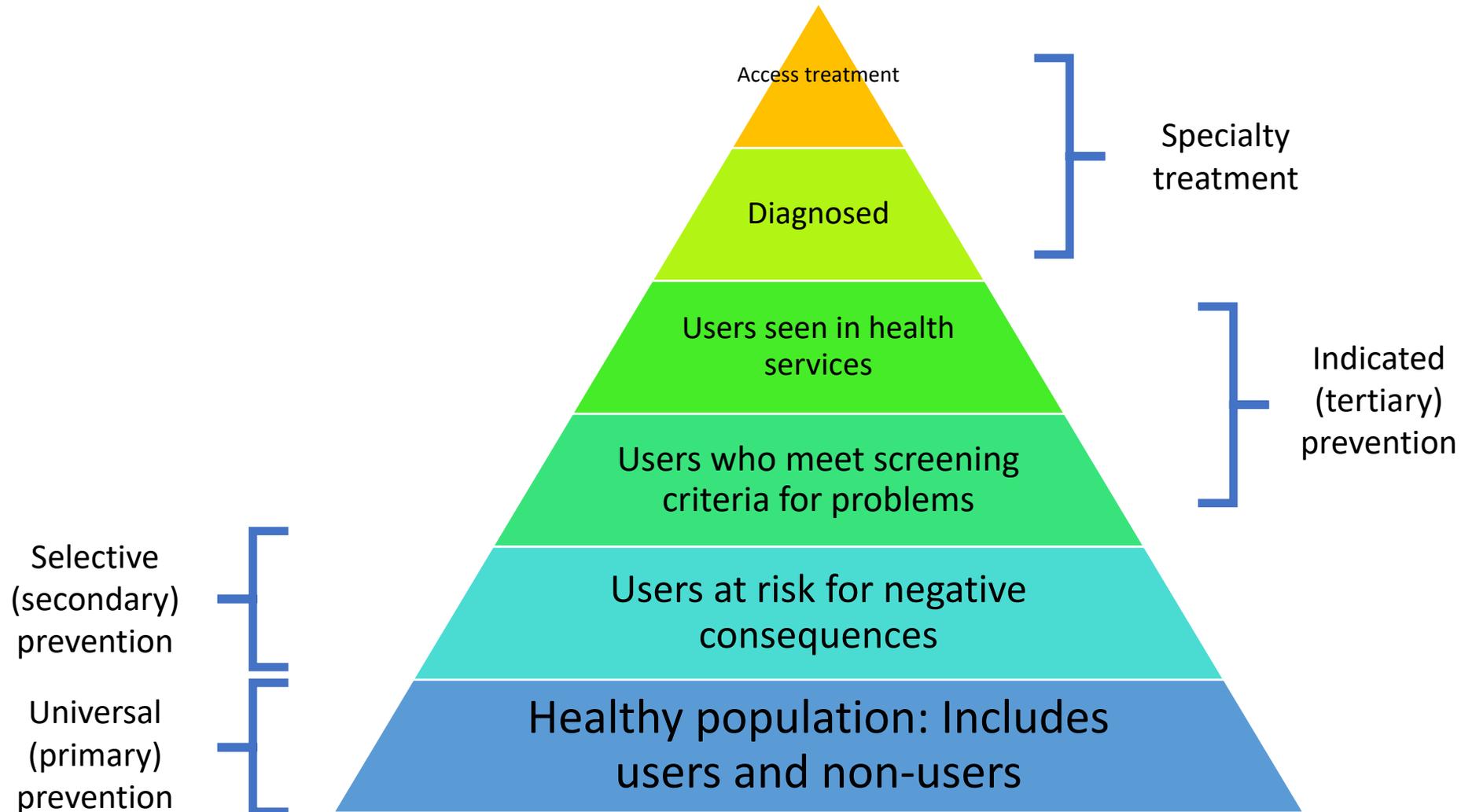
Other substance use among cannabis users scoring positive on the CUDIT (%)





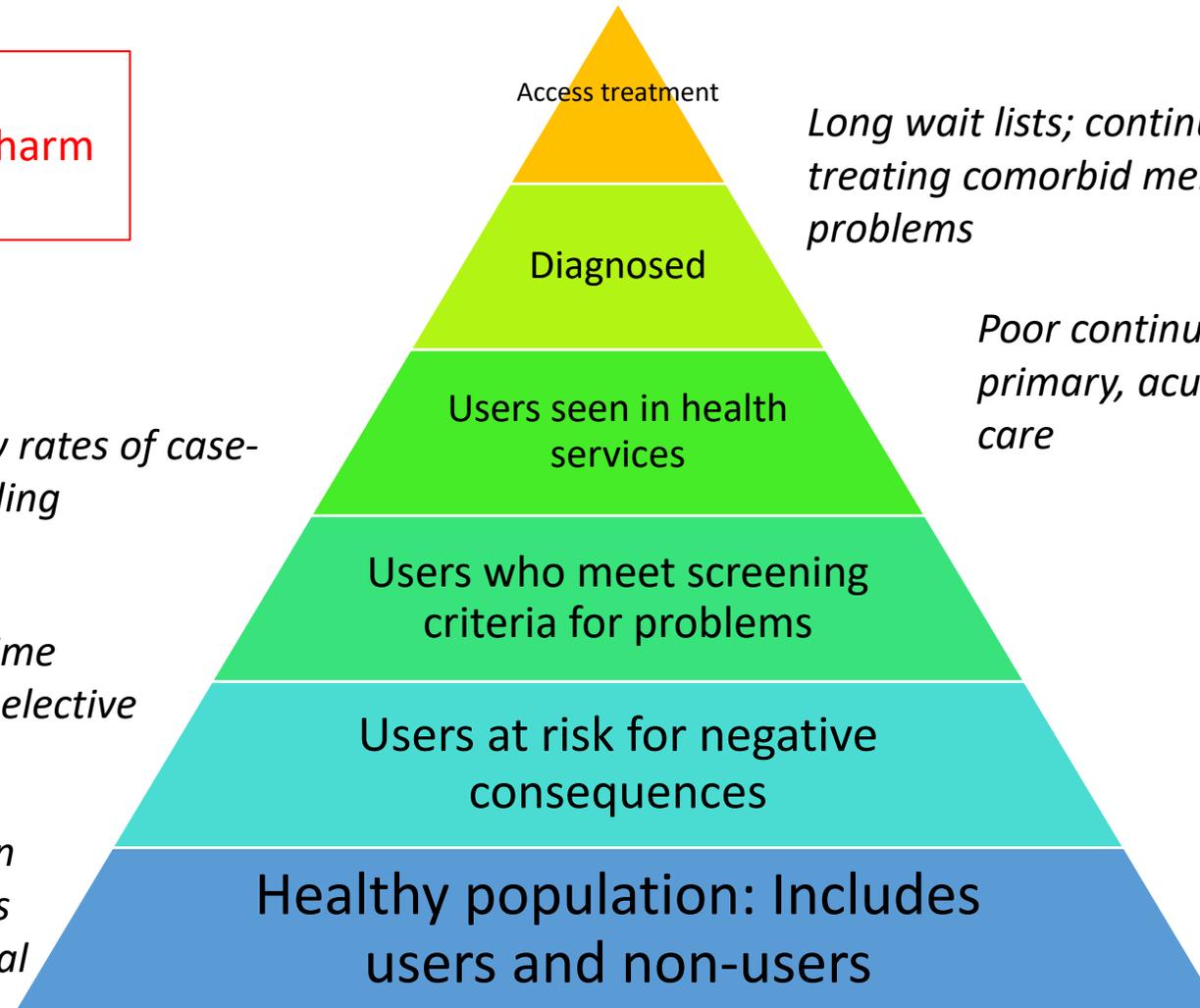
Toward effective secondary prevention

What interventions are offered for cannabis?



Prevention and treatment: Current state

**Elephant in the room:
Few tools for cannabis harm
reduction!**



Long wait lists; continuing problems treating comorbid mental health problems

Poor continuity of care between primary, acute, and specialty care

Low rates of case-finding

Costly and time consuming selective prevention

Ineffective universal prevention in mass communication and schools (scare tactics, passive educational approaches)

Intervention strategies slow to embrace harm reduction

Interventions implicitly assume that *abstinence* is the primary outcome of interest

- For those seeking treatment, vast majority of programs adopt this goal
- Prevention programs emphasize abstinence altogether, or delayed onset (temporary abstinence)

But...

- Many cannabis users – inside and outside of treatment – may not want to discontinue use altogether
- Recent Canadian qualitative research with youth who have already started to use substances indicates that they are skeptical of abstinence-oriented primary prevention (e.g., public service announcements), but would value accessing *trustworthy facts* (rather than scare tactics) about drugs, as well as help in understanding *warning signs for problematic use* and behaviour change options, including *self-care* and *how to access* more structured interventions and treatment

Source: Ti L, Fast D, Small W, Kerr T. Perceptions of a drug prevention public service announcement campaign among street-involved youth in Vancouver, Canada: A qualitative study. *Harm Reduction Journal*: 2017; 14:3 : DOI 10.1186/s12954-017-0132-7

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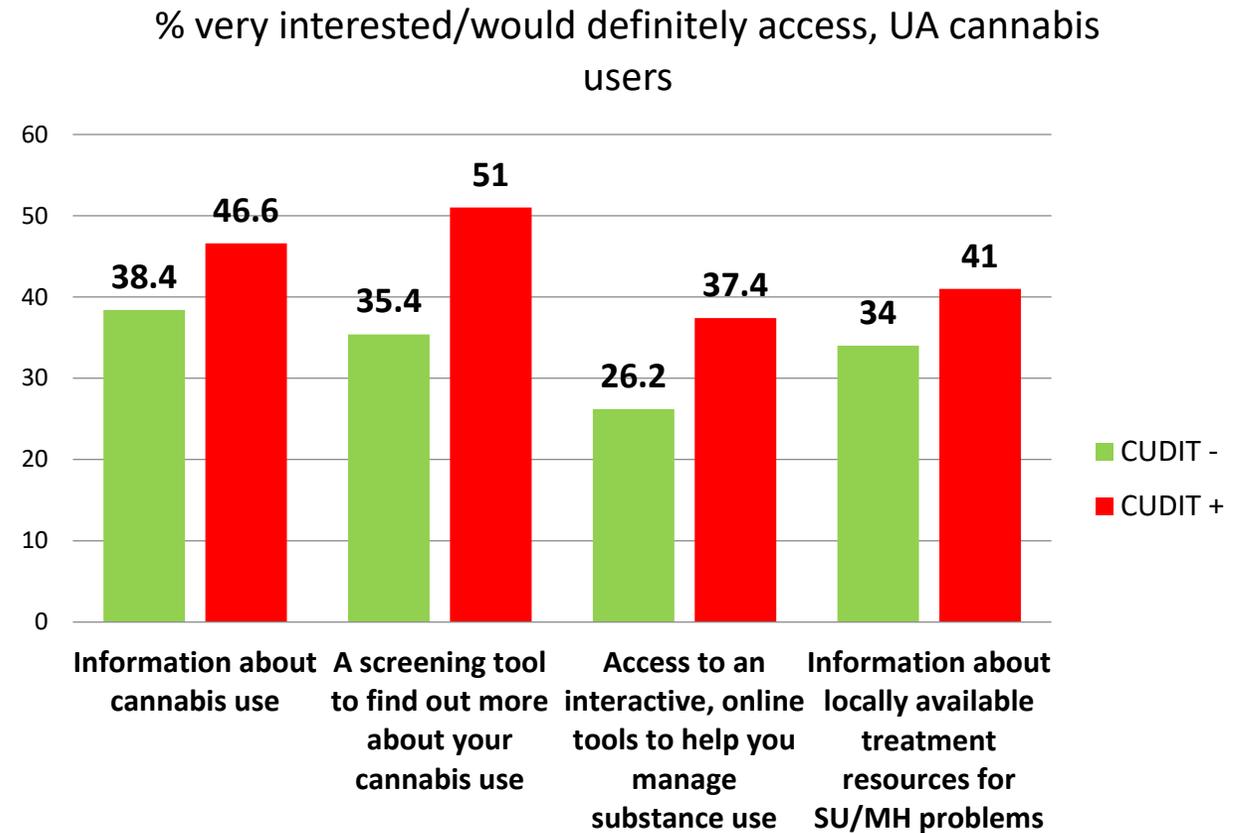
Toward effective secondary prevention

Concept

- Develop and test a secondary prevention approach, focusing on current users of cannabis
- Builds on work in the alcohol area on effectiveness of **screening and brief intervention** (SBI)
- Is **online**. Avoids uptake and scale-up problems associated with more intensive, face-to-face intervention approaches
- Adopts a **harm reduction** approach that doesn't presume abstinence as the only valued outcome. Provide cannabis users with *non-judgmental facts and choices* about online resources they want to use, as well as options about these can be used to support behaviour change if they choose this
- Incorporates **personalized assessment-feedback**, designed to correct *misperceived social norms* for cannabis use, e.g., mistaken beliefs that heavy cannabis use is more common in social reference groups than it actually is.

Are students who use cannabis interested in web-based supports?

If a website were available to you for free to provide the following information, how interested would you be in...

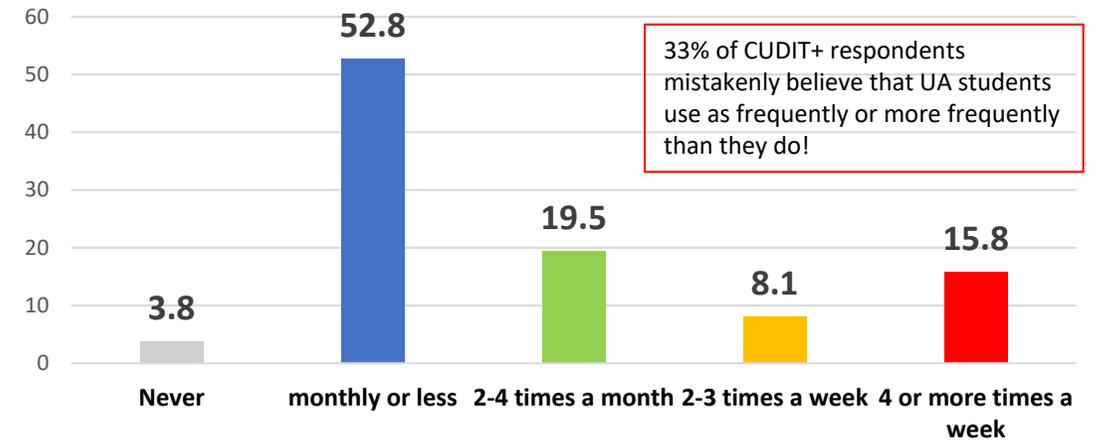


Why use personalized assessment-feedback?

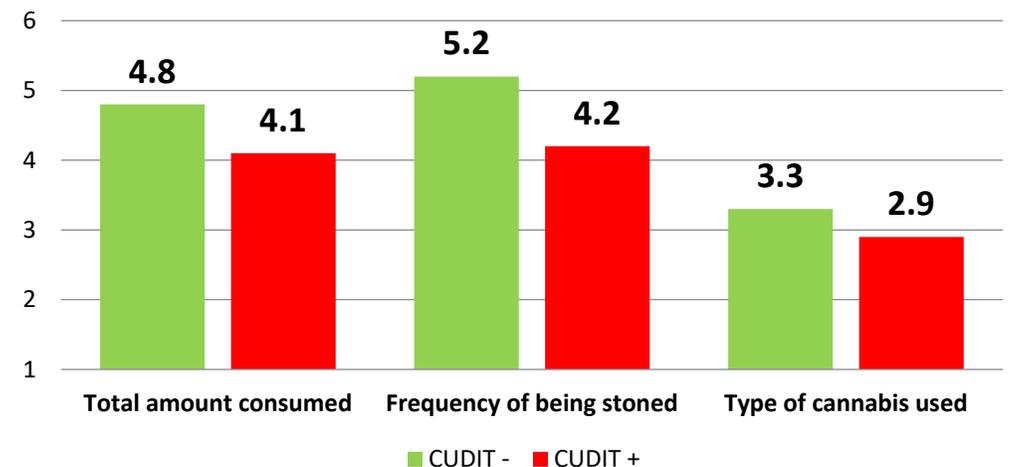
A large international literature demonstrates that frequent, heavy substance users hold mistaken beliefs about how common substance use is in social reference groups

True among U of A cannabis users?

Frequency of cannabis use – current [past 6 mo.] users (%)



Perceived importance of different criteria in defining cannabis use problems – current UA users



Screening, self-management, and referral to treatment (SSMRT)

A demonstration project under development by the Prairie Node of the Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse (CRISM). Provides online access by computer or mobile phone to a suite of secondary prevention resources for cannabis users, including:

1. A curated repository of *current evidence* on cannabis, its health effects, and federal/provincial regulations regarding its use,
2. Access to CRISM's *National Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines*
3. Access to the *Cannabis Use Disorders Identification Test* (CUDIT)
4. *Personalized assessment-feedback*: Users who complete the CUDIT are provided with customized feedback about how the frequency of their cannabis use and their CUDIT scores compare to same-sex reference populations, and
5. Listings of *local treatment programs* and supports for cannabis-related problems.

SSMRT Assessment Myths Guide For Use Prevalence Support

Free resources for people who need it, provided by experts, to help keep you safe.

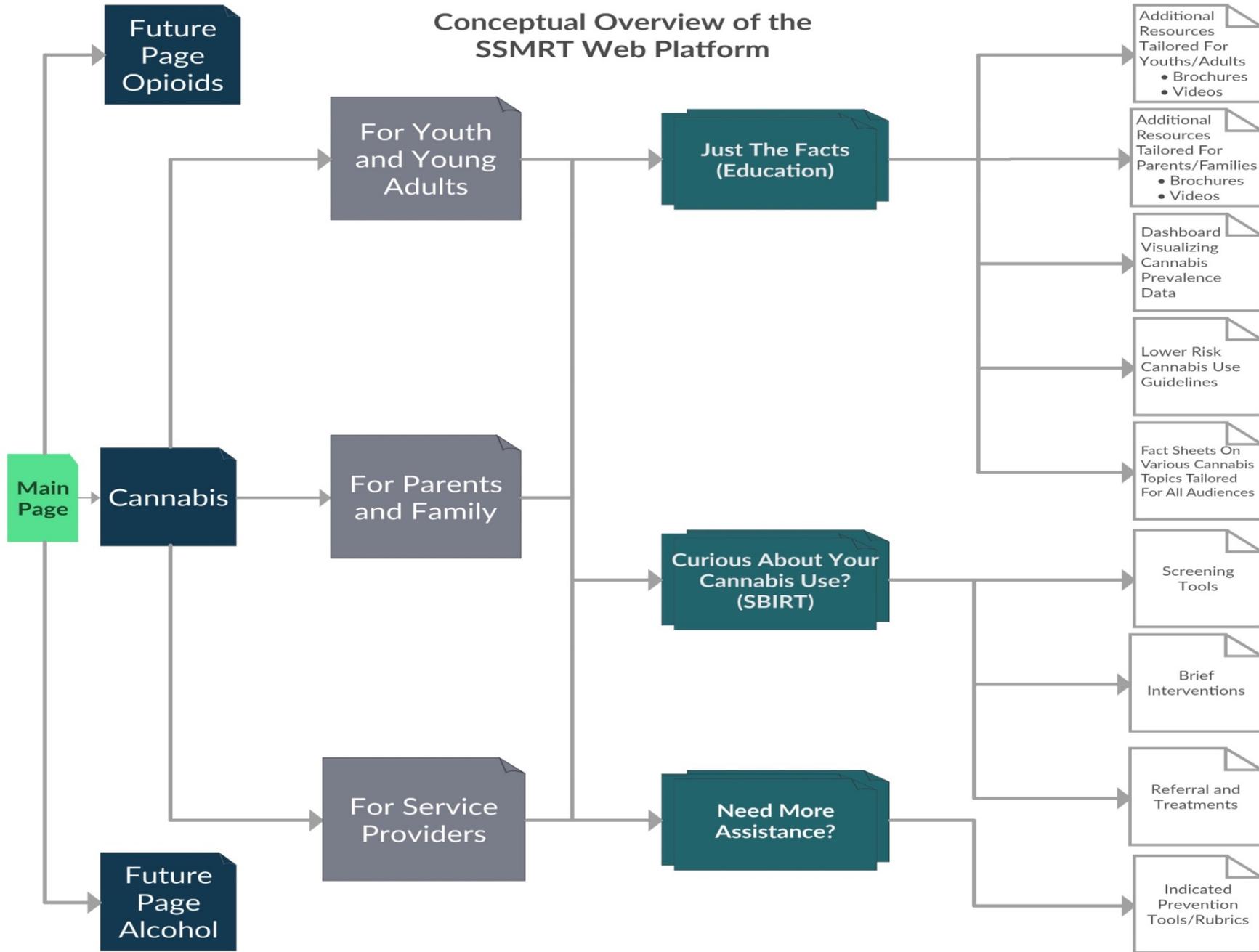
Explore Myths Guide for Use Use Prevalence Support

Curious about your cannabis use? Take an assessment and compare your use to others. [Find Out How I Compare](#)

About the Assessment

We are currently conducting a research project about cannabis use at the University of Alberta. If you are interested in potentially participating in this project, please click the button below to find out more about the research project. All of your information will be anonymous, which means that your responses will be assigned a random participant ID and in no way be used to track or to find out your identity.

Conceptual Overview of the SSMRT Web Platform



Thank you for your attention!

Support for University of Alberta's Addiction and Mental Health Lab and CRISM | Prairies provided by



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