

Cannabis use and concern among clients enrolled in addiction treatment

Pre-legalization demographics, comorbidities, and service use in Alberta

A joint project from:



CRISM | PRAIRIES

Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse

Below is a summary of key findings. The complete report is available at the [CRISM-AHS Advancement of Analytics in Addiction](#) project webpage.

Purpose

Analyze administrative data on clients enrolled in addiction treatment in the six years preceding cannabis legalization to describe trends in:

- Cannabis use
- Concern about cannabis use
- Client demographics, other health service use, and comorbid mental health diagnoses

Method

Administrative data on clients enrolled in specialty addiction treatment from 2012 to 2018 were linked across multiple health information systems, including:

- Admissions to acute care facilities
- Visits to emergency departments
- Visits to physicians

From 2012-2018:

102,392 unique clients were enrolled in addiction treatment services



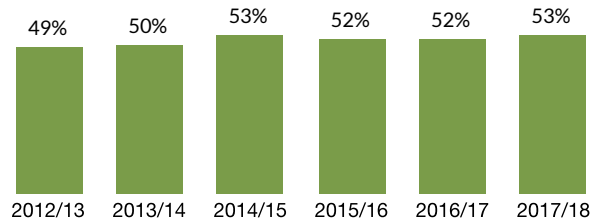
38% were enrolled two or more times

KEY FINDINGS: CANNABIS USE

Cannabis use was common and consistent over time.

Over all six years in the study period, about **half of all clients** reported cannabis use in the previous year.

Proportion of clients who reported using cannabis



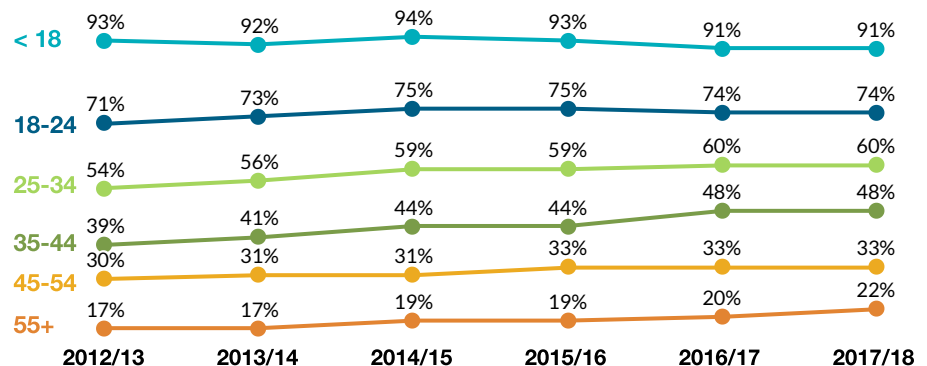
Males and females were quite similar in cannabis use.

For all six years in the study period, male and female clients reported nearly the same rate of cannabis use.

Younger clients were much more likely to report cannabis use.

From 2012-2018, **more than 90% of clients under the age of 18** had used cannabis in the past year. In comparison, **about 20% of clients 55+ years old** reported using cannabis in the past year.

Proportion of clients who reported using cannabis by age



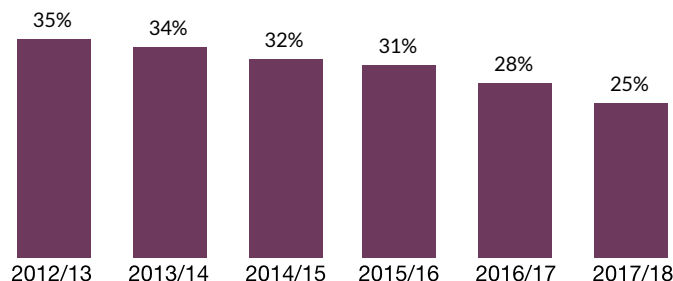


KEY FINDINGS: CANNABIS CONCERN

Clients who used cannabis reported fewer cannabis-related concerns over time.

Among clients who use cannabis, the proportion concerned about their use **decreased from 35% to 25%** over the six-year study period. This was consistent across all age groups and sexes.

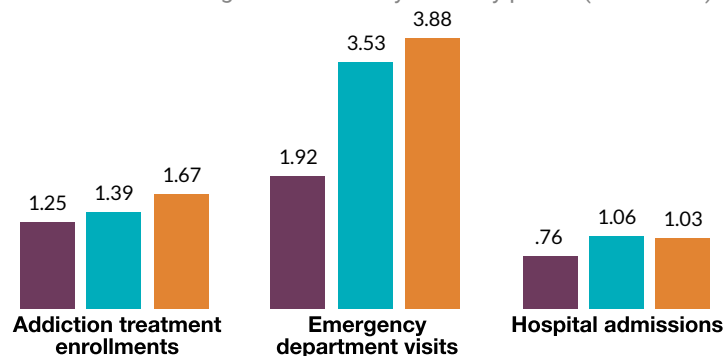
Proportion of cannabis users who are concerned with their use



Clients concerned about only their cannabis use were less likely to use healthcare services than clients concerned with their use of other substances.

Compared to clients concerned about **cannabis use only**, clients who were concerned about **alcohol use only** or **polysubstance use** were more frequent users of most healthcare services, **especially emergency departments.**

Healthcare service use by clients concerned about their cannabis use only, alcohol use only, and polysubstance use
Mean number averaged over the six-year study period (2012-2018)



Lifetime diagnoses of mood and anxiety disorders were common among clients.

From 2012-2018, over half of clients had lifetime diagnoses of mood and anxiety disorders. Psychiatric comorbidities were slightly more frequent among clients concerned about their cannabis use.

Psychiatric diagnosis (lifetime)	Concerned about cannabis use (6-year average)	Not concerned about cannabis use (6-year average)
Mood disorder	63%	56%
Anxiety disorder	56%	50%
Developmental disorder	22%	16%
Personality disorder	22%	16%