

## Washington State young adult health survey

### Overview

The Washington State Young Adult Health Survey measures cannabis and other substance use, perceptions of harm, risk factors, and consequences among young adults (18 to 25 years old) living in Washington State. Motivated by the passage of Initiative 502 in 2012, the survey began in 2014 before recreational cannabis stores opened their doors. Currently, the primary statutes for cannabis are now codified in RCW 69.50.

A total of 16,384 eligible young adults participated in the 2021 survey from eight cohorts. The survey is administered annually in summer/fall.

Survey data are used for:

- Implementing rules for cannabis statutes located in RCW 69.50.
- Monitoring trends in cannabis use patterns and consequences among young adults
- Assessing the impact of Initiative 502
- Surveillance, and to guide strategic planning of prevention and intervention programs

Key findings from the 2021 survey include:

- Cannabis is the second most used substance with 51% of young adults in 2021 reporting use for recreational purposes in the past year. This rate has been significantly increasing since 2014 (44%). Young adults ages 21-25 are driving this increase.
- In 2021, of those reporting cannabis use in the past 30 days, nearly one-quarter (23%) reported driving in the past month while still feeling high and nearly one-third (34%) reporting driving in the past month within 3 hours of cannabis use. Driving after cannabis use has decreased over time yet remains high.
- In 2021, among young adults that reported any use in the past year, 52% reported simultaneous use of alcohol and cannabis.

- The highest reported source of cannabis for young adults was from friends until 2016, while respondents 21 and older reported more frequently obtaining cannabis from retail stores.
- Since 2014, there have been substantial declines in the perceived physical risk of regular cannabis use, as well as in perceived emotional/psychological risk of regular cannabis use relative to other substances.
- Among respondents to the survey in 2021, perceptions of cannabis use among young adults is higher than the number of their peers who actually use.
- Of those reporting any lifetime cannabis use, about one-fifth (20%) reported that their use caused emotional or mental health problems and over one-third (34%) reported that cannabis had less effect than it used to.

### Eligibility requirements

Participants must be residents of Washington State and between the ages of 18 and 25. Respondents were recruited using a combination of direct mail advertising to a random sample of 18- to 25-year-olds registered with the Department of Licensing and online advertising, including social media. Eligibility is confirmed via telephone interviews with potential survey respondents.

### Authority

The dedicated cannabis account (RCW 69.50.540) authorizes the use of revenue to pay for the Washington State Healthy Youth Survey and an expansion to include the young adult population (the Washington Young Adult Health Survey). The surveys are managed by the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery within the Washington State Health Care Authority.

### 2021-23 budget

\$400,000 per biennium dedicated cannabis account funds for annual surveys in state fiscal years 2021-2023.

### Key partners

The survey is conducted collaboratively by the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery within

the Washington State Health Care Authority and its contractor, the University of Washington. The State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup member agencies and partners advise survey development and implementation.

**For More information:**

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