

FACTSHEET



TAKE 5: LEGISLATIVE REVIEW OF THE CANNABIS ACT – WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

In 2017, the Cannabis Act officially legalized weed use for those over 18, ending nearly a century of cannabis prohibition in Canada. To track the impacts of legalization and key developments in cannabis use and public health, a panel of experts was tasked by the federal government to undertake a legislative review of the Cannabis Act, including a specific focus on youth. Their first report, [Legislative Review of the Cannabis Act – What We Heard](#), summarizes initial findings from consultations with stakeholders across the country on important themes related to cannabis use.

The report was developed using feedback from engagement activities, roundtables, presentations, written submissions, and available qualitative and quantitative research.

So, who did the Expert Panel consult? They met with more than 500 people from over 200 organizations, including:

- ✱ researchers and academics in various fields
- ✱ health care professionals and organizations
- ✱ youth and youth advocates
- ✱ First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people
- ✱ the cannabis industry
- ✱ equity-deserving groups
- ✱ people with diverse lived and living experience
- ✱ cannabis consumers
- ✱ ... and more!

The Expert Panel will continue to consult with stakeholders throughout the fall of 2023, and will present findings and recommendations to the Minister of Health and the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Dr. Oyedeji Ayonrinde – Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Psychology, Queen’s University, and a member of [YouthREX’s Academic Network](#) – is one of five Expert Panelists appointed by the Minister of Health and the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to conduct the legislative review of the Cannabis Act.

Kathe Rogers, [YouthREX’s Knowledge Exchange Director](#), participated in a stakeholder roundtable hosted by the Expert Panel in February 2023.





TL;DR: the report is long (nearly 120 pages!), so here are the top 5 takeaways from the legislative review of the Cannabis Act that are especially relevant to young people and the youth sector:



01. More public education, drug prevention, and treatment efforts are needed (p. 5)

There is a “need for an evidence-based approach” in program development that encourages “credible, realistic, and relevant initiatives” that are developed by youth, for youth (p. 6). Programs that only emphasize abstinence are seen as largely ineffective.



02. Legalization has not led to a noticeable decrease in youth cannabis use (p. 6)

Many of the consulted groups expressed concern that young people in Canada are still using weed at a disproportionately high rate when compared with other jurisdictions. Youth cannabis use has not seen a significant decrease in the five years since legalization.



03. Youth continue to report that cannabis is easy to get (p. 31)

National surveys suggest that youth continue to rely heavily on social sources and the illicit market to gain access to cannabis. Youth said that they generally do not perceive buying illicit cannabis as a high-risk activity and are likely to use cannabis in conjunction with other substances like alcohol.



04. Mental health concerns continue to dominate reasons why youth use cannabis (p. 32)

Youth have a variety of reasons for using cannabis, including: to get high; to relieve emotional, social, and mental distress; post-traumatic stress disorder; trauma; anxiety; depression; loneliness; and stimulating appetite for eating disorders. Youth noted that discussions regarding negative impacts of cannabis are not prevalent in peer conversations.



05. When it comes to cannabis messaging, the source is as important as the content (p. 33)

The most effective public education is delivered by trusted adults, peers, and people with lived and living experience, compared to figures viewed as authorities, like physicians or government officials. Information from the former group is perceived as being more credible and has a greater impact on young people’s decisions.

Read the complete report on [YouthREX’s Knowledge Hub](#).

