

HEALTH REPORT

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CANNABIS ACCEPTANCE UP IN SMOKE

New research has cast doubt on the perception that most young Australians consider cannabis to be a benign and harmless drug with a third now viewing it as unacceptable.

Data in the latest Pfizer Australia Health Report jointly published with the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC), based at the University of NSW, shows that a high proportion of young adults perceive the drug as dangerous, addictive and linked to a range of health and social problems.

The study finds that although almost half (47 percent) of under 30s have friends who use cannabis, one third say that their peer group find its use unacceptable.

"There appears to be a shift in attitude regarding cannabis, even among those people in our community who are more likely to come into contact with the drug," says Paul Dillon from NDARC.

Concern about the effects of cannabis on the community is also high with 83 percent of all Australian adults believing there are social problems associated with its use.

Other findings include:

- Three-in-four Australians feel cannabis use is dangerous or very dangerous;
- Around 40 percent think cannabis is always addictive with one-in-five thinking it always leads to other drug use, and 60 percent thinking it sometimes leads to other drug use;
- Sixty-eight percent of all Australians believe cannabis use can lead to other crime;
- Close to two-thirds would be equally concerned over whether their adolescent child was smoking cigarettes or smoking cannabis;
- Half of all Australians believe that cannabis can cause schizophrenia, depression and anxiety disorders to a moderate or large degree.



The report also reveals public opinion is in favour of more action by governments on cannabis. Seventy seven percent of those surveyed believed that authorities should run a public health campaign about the effects of cannabis.

The introduction of roadside drug testing is strongly supported by close to 80 percent of those surveyed. Most felt that cannabis would affect a person's ability to drive a car and increase the likelihood of a car accident.

The research found that 60 percent agree that people arrested for cannabis use and possession should be referred to treatment programs rather than be punished under the criminal justice system.

"It appears that although Australians believe cannabis is not acceptable in their peer group, they do feel that there should be support given to those who use it," Paul Dillon commented.

Currently only 10 percent of Australians get their information about cannabis from a drug or alcohol service with others seeking information from sources such as friends, internet, magazines and television.

Mr Dillon says it is important that Australians seek information from a reliable source.

"Friends, family, even the internet can sometimes get it wrong, especially when it comes to separating fact from fiction," Mr Dillon said.

"There are no black and white answers with cannabis, only shades of grey. These subtleties are often difficult to communicate and can lead to misinformation being disseminated and a polarisation of views."

"This research clearly shows that it is important that the Australian public is provided good quality information on the health and social impacts of cannabis. There are plans for a new National Cannabis Centre to be opened this year, funded by the Australian Government, which will hopefully assist in this area."

NDARC has collaborated with Pfizer Australia to assist with educating the public about cannabis to produce this month's edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report. Filled with useful information, free copies can be requested by phoning **1800 675 229** or by visiting www.healthreport.com.au where people can also sign-up for email alerts of future editions.

Findings are based on responses from 1439 Australians aged 18 years and over. The research was conducted in 2006 by independent consultants Stollznow Research.

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NB: INTERVIEWS AVAILABLE WITH NDARC SPOKESPERSON PAUL DILLON

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