



Canadian Centre  
on Substance Abuse  
Centre canadien de lutte  
contre les toxicomanies

Partnership. Knowledge. Change.  
Collaboration. Connaissance. Changement.

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Adolescent Marijuana Use and Its Impact on the Developing Brain

**Toronto, June 17, 2015** — In the sixth report in its signature *Substance Abuse in Canada* series, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) today released research shedding critical light on how using cannabis (also known as marijuana) affects the developing adolescent brain.

Canadian youth have the highest rate of marijuana use in the developed world, and marijuana is the most commonly used illegal drug among Canadians aged 15 to 24 years. Today's report confirms that early and frequent marijuana use among this age group involves a greater risk of cognitive and behavioural impairment than marijuana use among adults.

Compiled by several well-known and respected experts in the field of marijuana research, *The Effects of Cannabis Use during Adolescence* provides a high-level, broad overview of the latest research on the issue. It gives valuable and useful evidence to teachers, healthcare providers and policy makers to help them develop and employ more effective youth drug use prevention and intervention programs. It will also help increase knowledge and understanding among parents, communities and people working with youth about the effects that marijuana use, particularly regular use, can have in adolescence and beyond.

CCSA sought to answer the following questions in the report:

- What is the impact of marijuana on the brains and behaviour of young people?
- Is there a link between marijuana use and mental illness?
- Is marijuana addictive?

The report answers these questions with evidence that marijuana is not a benign substance. Early and frequent use can seriously limit a young person's educational, occupational and social development, and some of these adverse effects may be irreversible. Marijuana is also linked to mental illness, it is addictive, and it produces cognitive and motor function impairment that can present a safety hazard for drivers. Furthermore, previous CCSA research has shown that youth do not perceive marijuana to be a harmful substance, and there is evidence showing that as perceptions of risk decrease, rates of use increase.

CCSA makes recommendations on what further steps should be taken, including:

- Early identification and more effective treatment of problematic marijuana use;
- Expanded prevention and intervention programs targeted at youth; and
- More Canadian-based research and better data to inform policy, practice and programs.

For more information on the report's findings and recommendations, please consult the [Backgrounder](#), [Report in Short](#) and full [Technical Report](#).

For over a quarter century, CCSA has lead the national dialogue on how to reduce the harms of alcohol and other drugs, including the release of national strategies on alcohol and prescription drug abuse. As part of this mandate, CCSA launched the *Substance Abuse in Canada* series in 2005 to draw attention to key substance abuse issues and highlight areas for action in both policy and practice. The organization is committed to ensuring that the millions of Canadians with substance use disorders have access to timely, high-quality treatment, and that recovery from this chronic health issue is an attainable and sustainable reality.



## Quotes

“There is a significant debate in the public arena today about the place of marijuana in Canadian society. As Canada’s only national organization with a mandate to present best evidence on the harms of drugs and alcohol in our society, CCSA initiated this report on the effects of adolescent marijuana use at a critical time to contribute to greater public awareness and a more informed dialogue. The report is a timely review looking at what developmental, cognitive and mental health harms can arise from early and frequent use among youth, who are the future of our country. Canadian youth must understand and acknowledge that marijuana is not a harmless drug. CCSA believes that only a sustained, national and collaborative effort will be successful in addressing this issue.”

*Rita Notarandrea*  
*Chief Executive Officer (interim)*  
*Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse*

“The new report released by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse is an important contribution to the ongoing global debates about the effects of cannabis use on health, and its focus on youth – the future of every nation – once again reminds us that cannabis use in adolescence can have a negative impact on psychosocial development, and prevention of cannabis and other substance use among young people should be a public health priority for contemporary societies.”

*Dr. Vladimir Poznyak*  
*Coordinator, Management of Substance Abuse*  
*World Health Organization*

“CCSA’s report gives a solid summary of the latest research around the effects of cannabis use during adolescence, and provides professionals with information that is based in evidence – rather than myth or hype – that will be useful to parents and youth. The report is particularly important during this time of increasing public debate about the place of marijuana within Canadian society to better inform this discourse.”

*Diane Buhler*  
*Executive Director*  
*Parent Action on Drugs*

“As the science continues to evolve in this area, it is important to be proactive and use the latest evidence to guide our present policies and practices. The latest *Substance Abuse in Canada* report provides useful information and advice to those interested in working in the field.”

*Dr. Franco Vaccarino*  
*President and Professor of Psychology, University of Guelph*  
*Chair, CCSA Scientific Advisory Council*

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The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse changes lives by bringing people and knowledge together to reduce the harm of alcohol and other drugs on society. We partner with public, private and non-governmental organizations to improve the health and safety of Canadians.

CCSA activities and products are made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada. The views of CCSA do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Canada.