

The Evidence (transcript)

Season 1, Episode 4

Topic: Cannabis Communications Guide

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[ANNOUNCER:] You're listening to *The Evidence*—knowledge that inspires.

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[ANNOUNCER:] *The Evidence*: produced by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.

[Lee Arbon:] Welcome to another episode of *The Evidence*, your premier podcast on substance use in Canada.

[Amanda Deseure:] We're your hosts, Amanda Deseure and Lee Arbon, and today we're talking pot.

[LA:] Yes, we're talking about cannabis. It's been a number of months since cannabis has become legal and we're talking today with two women who helped develop the cannabis communication guide.

[AD:] A premier resource for CCSA, it's been one of our most successful and has some pretty groundbreaking downloads.

[LA:] And I'm really looking forward to talking to Kiran and Chealsea in more detail about that and other topics related to the cannabis communication guide. It's coming up real soon.

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[ANNOUNCER:] This is *The Evidence*. If you find today's topic interesting, be sure to visit ccsa.ca for more information.

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[AD:] We're joined by Kiran Somjee, National Priority Advisor, and Chealsea De Moor, Knowledge Broker, who both work with us at CCSA. They both have been working on the Talking Pot guide... We're so happy you both were able to join us today. We know you've been extremely busy doing interviews, presentations, TV appearances, pretty sure I heard you on the radio twice, all talking about the new cannabis communication guide, so thank you so much for being here.



[Kiran Somjee:] Thanks so much for having us.

[LA:] So let's talk a bit about your background for a second. I mean, Kiran, you're a registered nurse, Chealsea, you got a degree in psychology and worked in criminology a bit. How, you know, how did you get into that, and how did that have an impact on the guide?

[1:56]

[Chealsea De Moor:] Sure, absolutely. So this is Chealsea De Moor speaking. So, I have a background in criminal justice, I have a master's in forensic psychology from Carleton University, and much of my interest in substance use and addiction really started in my undergrad. I had a very great mentor who became a... played a huge role in my life, and he was involved in addictions research. And so from my undergrad I took a few courses, I got involved in that, and I took an interest with offender populations. They generally tend to show quite problematic use, more widespread than we'd see in the general population. So that really kind of piqued my interest and that has led toward- paved the way to where I'm at now. Hmm... And I'll speak to sort of how my work has influenced the work on the guide a bit... a bit later. But just, I guess, a bit of a caveat, I'll be speaking a lot about harm reduction, and how that approach can be sort of applied universally so, happy to be here, and really, really excited to share our work.

[KS:] And my name is Kiran, I'm a registered nurse and a national priority advisor at CCSA, and really, for me, my background really stems in the area of mental health promotion and the social determinants of health and health equity, really looking at the underlying root causes that impact how... And so, you know, looking at substance use and addiction, and looking at the cross- sort of close relationship with mental health as well, has just been sort of the driver and the passion behind where I kind of landed. In this role, I've done a lot of work in the area of mental health as I mentioned, but a lot of work in the area of strategy and partnerships, so I think that from the nursing perspective, that's the lens that I bring to the organization, into our work, specifically on the communication guide, and that's been really, really great in terms of looking at how to apply resources such as this out there, in practice, on the ground, you know, really to have that impact and to make a difference. So that's what I bring, and I'm really excited to be on the project, be at CCSA and be on the podcast today!

[3:53]

[LA:] So, how did this project, like, come together? Is it because cannabis became legal, was it because there's something, you know, missing in the stream of products for youth? How did, you know, the green light happen?

[CD:] So, in 2017, we released our *Canadian Youth Perceptions on Cannabis* report. So what we did is a few researchers from CCSA, Anna McKiernan and Katie Fleming, went out and they conducted focus groups with youth. So we got youth from the ages of 14 to 19 to volunteer to partake in these focus groups and we were really trying to get a sense of what young people know about cannabis, what they might not know and really get at some of those misperceptions that may exist in that population. And what we heard from youth and what we sort of summarized from that research is that young people are very curious about cannabis, and these curiosities, you know, were identified prior to legalization. So they're very curious, they're doing a lot of research—a lot of that happens online, as we know. But they're leaving quite confused. There's a lot of information out there, a lot of potentially misinformation, and young people don't always have the skillsets to identify what a credible resource is. So what we heard from them is that they're really lacking in that evidence, in that



information. They're dying to have these open and honest conversations with, you know, parents, different individuals in their lives... But they're simply not having those conversations, and they're not getting the information that they're wanting to get from that. So what we heard is that they really want to have open and honest, non-judgmental conversations with, you know, the adults or what we've termed "youth allies" in their lives, to really be able to feel empowered to make their own decisions about cannabis use.

[KS:] And as we know, and as we've heard, youth allies, and when we say youth allies, you know, we mean teachers, we mean educators, we mean coaches, we mean the people that connect with youth and have those conversations about cannabis. They've identified to us that, you know, while there are educational resources out there that talk about the evidence and the information, there are gaps that sort of address the process and how to approach the conversation and really build that fundamental foundation on how to have these conversations. So that's where the gap was and that's where the need was. So CCSA developed this cannabis communication guide in- with input and in collaboration with youth and youth allies. So we used a co-design process to come up with the materials and the information that we included within the guide, and this format of creation really allowed for those open and authentic discussions with input from youth and youth allies. You know, things like what visuals are we going to include, what kind of language is developmentally appropriate for these young people. And how our harm reductions messages should really be framed and put into the guide so that they resonate with young people and youth allies, and having conversations and setting them up to be successful. The co-design process that we used to actually develop this guide also helped highlight the importance of the non-stigmatizing language we should use, how to use age-appropriate language, and how that would resonate with young people and youth as well. So the gap really helped us fill the need for, okay, what is required out there in the fields? And then, how do we approach that from a key messages and harm reduction point of view?

[7:05]

[AD:] And when you guys were in co-development, I'm kind of dying to know what the youth said to you to be honest, and what the youth allies had said. Is there anything really interesting or almost a little shocking that you heard that you think might be worth sharing?

[KS:] Yeah, I mean, in the co-design workshops, we heard, you know, things from youth that I don't think were new to us, from the youth perceptions work that we had done, but they really reaffirmed for us what we were hearing already, in terms of the perceptions and the misperceptions that exist. So, some of the things were things like, you know, "we want conversations to be open, we want them to be credible, we want them to be balanced." You know, they want to know about both sides of the story, they don't want to just hear about the harms and the health effects. They really want to know about the benefits and medical use, and they really want to approach these conversations from a non-judgmental kind of way. I mean, you've told us that, you know, if you're going to judge me on what I'm saying, or if you're going to be stigmatizing towards what I have to share, that's going to be a barrier in communication. So they want those conversations to be really coming from a place of understanding, and they want youth allies to ask them, you know, what are their experiences with cannabis, what are their questions, what are their curiosities, what are they wanting to know, and not to judge that, and not to come at it from an opinion or biased perspective. They also want them to be credible, and they want them to be evidence-based, so we really took that, and we really incorporated the evidence base into our key messages. Our cannabis communication guide has key messages that are research-based, and that presents the



research in a balanced way, so they present the facts in a neutral way, and that really supports youth allies in facilitating the conversation and sort of decreasing the barriers in that conversation.

[LA:] On one of our previous episodes we had Rita Notarandrea on the podcast, and one of the things we asked her was if with the legalization of cannabis, did we see, did she see perceptions and viewpoints changing with response to becoming legal. And I was wondering if you had seen similar kind of changes in opinions or viewpoints with regards to youth while you were working on this project.

[9:11]

[CD:] I was invited to a few events to speak to some undergraduate students very recently, so this would have been post-legalization. And certainly, the misperceptions are still there. They do exist and this kind of really lends itself to the understanding that we have work to do around public education. With that being said, a lot of those undergrads really did share with us that they are interested in sort of having these conversations and bringing them more to like a campus life, so incorporating that more into everyday dialogue and making those conversations more commonplace. So I think that while we don't have a lot of research to speak to whether those misperceptions have changed or whether they will change, we do know that young people, they are interested in this, and they are wanting to find ways to be able to have these conversations with their peers and kind of take the reins, you know, within their own campuses and their own schools. So I certainly think that this lends itself to an opportunity for us to continue our efforts in public education and really, really try to hone in our harm reduction messaging, cause that's very important for those young people.

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[LA:] On that note, we're gonna take a short break and we'll be back shortly with Kiran and Chealsea talking more about the *Talking Pot with Youth* guide. Stay with us.

[ANNOUNCER:] *Addiction News Daily* delivers a news scan of relevant articles, events and resources related to substance issues directly to your inbox Monday to Friday. Join our almost 3,000 subscribers in receiving news that's relevant and interesting. Sign up today by visiting www.ccsa.ca.

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[LA:] Welcome back to *The Evidence*, and we're here with Kiran and Chealsea, we're talking pot with youth with the new cannabis communication guide. Now this is not another piece of literature, this is not a "what?", this is a practical how-to guide to talk to youth about cannabis, correct?

[11:05]

[CD:] You summed it up perfectly. So this resource is really meant to be supportive, it's meant to guide what we would identify as a youth ally through the conversation. What we mean by a youth ally is someone who interacts frequently with young people, so this could be a parent, this could be a coach, a teacher, a nurse, anyone who sort of fits the criteria as we've defined it in the guide so, you know, having respect and sort of that open dialogue with young people, so anyone who really feels like they interact with young people and want to have, you know, foster more open, honest conversations would want to take a look at our guide for sure.



[AD:] So to talk about the success of this guide just for a minute: the cannabis communication guide actually has almost 30,000 downloads as of today, which is available on CCSA's website. I was wondering if you could talk about why it's been so successful. You're talking about youth allies and all these different stakeholder groups and folks who are using this guide. Why? What's so attractive about it? Why has it been so successful?

[KS:] The guide has been designed in such a way that it's meant to be an application piece. You know, we have heard some great feedback from our partners, that the guide has been used, you know, in community events, where parents are coming to gather, to learn how to talk to their kids about this, you know, cannabis piece that's been legalized, the conversations are happening at the family dinner table, they're happening in community centres, they're happening in doctors' offices, they're happening in schools. And so really, the guide takes a process-based approach. As we mentioned earlier, it's the how-to, you know, it sets up the right conditions and the criteria in terms of what makes the conversation successful. And that's what the power of the resource is, it's the how-to piece, and I think that the application, and it being so user-friendly from the application point of view is what's made it successful. We've had a lot of feedback that tells us that youth allies are using it in training courses, they're using it, you know, on the side of their desk to sort of help facilitate conversations, at school programs, in recreational programs, with coaches, with teachers, so really all around it's being applied in all kinds of different settings.

[13:16]

[LA:] I mean, it has to, it has to have a practical approach. I mean, they've been told for so long, you know, "this is bad, this is bad, and this is BAD," and then when it becomes legalized, you're almost giving the perception, "well this is good, this is okay." So, I mean, I would suspect, you know, being a parent myself, it puts parents in a very awkward situation when they've preached for so long this specific mandate, and now they somewhat have to do a 180.

[KS:] You know, the reality is that, regardless of the legality of cannabis, young people have been using cannabis and they will continue to use cannabis. The importance here is really the approach, and for this it's harm reduction. So the recognition that substance use is going to continue and it's going to happen, but it's really being realistic about that, and sort of focusing our efforts on minimizing the risks associated with that use. So instead of telling young people, "don't use cannabis," we should be informing them of how they can use it safely, because we need to be realistic about that.

[LA:] And I mean, obviously things are still in process, I mean, we're a couple months away from having brick-and-mortar stores, there's, you know, edibles coming in too, becoming legalized at the end of the year. I mean, so what's the next step for you guys with regards to this guide? Is it a secondary guide, is it a different project? Which way are you guys moving forward now?

[KS:] I mean, I think with the traction that we've had with the communication guide and, you know, just understanding that there's a need for process-based resources, the next piece that we're looking at is in terms of edibles, and really supporting our youth allies, you know, whether it be health care practitioners, whether it be teachers, whether it be coaches, on how to have those successful conversations around whatever the next piece is. So that's one of the areas that we're going to be focusing our efforts into. And you know, being a nurse myself, like, we're looking at it from an application point of view, as I mentioned earlier. You know, we work in a variety of settings, we support our partners in a variety of settings,



whether it be in hospitals, in schools, in community centres, etc. And the power of this resource, as I mentioned earlier, is in its application, so we're going to be looking at adding pieces to it, around edibles or around other concerns that we're going to hear from youth and youth allies as we take this resource out, and incorporating that feedback into the guide.

[15:27]

[AD:] Thanks, Kiran. I was just thinking, is the conversation around edibles and drinks going to be really different than the conversation around perhaps, you know, more traditional ways of consuming cannabis? I know online there's been a lot of discussion around, like, edibles kind of looking kid-friendly, or looking youth-friendly. Is it going to be a difference?

[LA:] That's a great point, and I didn't mean to interrupt... I mean, like, I have three daughters, and they're, you know, two of them are 7 and 8, and a gummy bear looks great to them, but they don't necessarily know what's in it, if it's got cannabis infused into it...

[KS:] Right, and I think, I think both of you make a fantastic point here, and that's why so much of our effort is focused on public education and awareness piece. Like, that's the- sort of the goal here in terms of education and awareness, and I think it's about, you know, as Chealsea mentioned earlier, it's about young people, and it's about informing them about the harms that are associated with these different products, and doing it in a balanced way so that's it's not from a threatening approach like, "don't touch that gummy bear, EVER," but "be informed that there are going to be some gummy bears out there that have, you know, these products in them, and that may be harmful for your health for these reasons." We, you know, have, we sort of say this when we talk about- whether it's cannabis, edibles or some of the pieces coming up, that we want to normalize the conversation and not normalize the use. And when we normalize the conversation, what we do is we open up the door to having those conversations early, so that young people are informed about what the risks are out there, what the harms are associated with and what products they should be aware of.

[AD:] Thank you both so much, that was incredible. I think me and Lee have learned a lot, and I really hope the folks listening to this podcast have as well.

[LA:] Yeah, and we'd love to have you guys on back again when, you know, edibles become legal and talk about the work you've done with that when it's finalized.

[CD:] Absolutely, we'd be happy to join you again.

[KS:] Yeah, thank you so much for having us!

[LA:] Our pleasure.

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[LA:] We'll be right back here on *The Evidence*. Stay tuned!

[17:18]

[ANNOUNCER:] Like our show? Have a comment or question? Want to suggest a guest for *The Evidence*? Email us at podcast@ccsa.ca, and let us know. We want to hear your take on *The Evidence*.

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[LA:] Well, we're back, and we've just finished our interview with Kiran and Chealsea talking pot and the cannabis communication guide. It was really informative, you know, 20 to 30 minutes.



[AD:] Absolutely, I... It was extremely interesting and, after learning more about the guide, I can't help but be very curious, actually, about how you plan to talk to your daughters, Lee. You've heard about the guide, you have three girls. Do you plan on using *Talking Pot*, or have you already spoke to them? Did you integrate these types of principles into your talk with your kids?

[LA:] Well, my oldest daughter, she's going to officially become a teenager next month, and so I think, you know, she's at that stage where I think I need to use this and sit down and talk to her about it, and have that whole-hearted discussion and I think, you know, just some of the stuff that Chealsea and Kiran enlightened us on will make it a lot easier to have that talk with her.

[AD:] I believe it. I think, after listening to them, it's interesting and important, I think, for us to really try and balance the scales on it, and give them what's important, whether that's, you know, some of the effects and also some of the good parts of cannabis use.

[LA:] And that's our show, we've come to the end of another episode of *The Evidence*. We want to thank Kiran and Chealsea for stopping in and taking the time to join us and speak to us today. And of course to all of you who have tuned in to listen, be sure to join us next time for another episode of *The Evidence*.

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