



# Cannabis Legalization Observations 2021–2022: Key Findings for Policy Development

## Key Points

- Research shows movement toward the intended objectives of the *Cannabis Act*, but there are still areas that require more research in a postpandemic context.
- Policy makers need to consider how future policy development responds to:
  - The continued risk of harm to children and youth;
  - The continued expansion of the cannabis market, which has yet to stabilize; and
  - The growing use of different product formats, including vaping, edibles and extracts.
- The *Cannabis Legalization: 2021–22 Observations Report* includes key findings to shape future directions for cannabis-related research, policy development and public health education.

## Background

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (2022) published the *Cannabis Legalization: 2021–2022 Observations* report to provide an update on the implementation and effects of cannabis legalization in Canada. The report summarizes the effects according to the act's objectives and is intended as a resource for researchers, analysts and interested members of the public. This topic summary draws on the report to identify key findings that are relevant for future policy development to reduce cannabis-related harms to people living in Canada.

Speaking about the effects of legalization is complicated by the difficulty in untangling the extent to which effects seen after March 2020 are linked with legalization in 2018 or the COVID-19 pandemic. Close monitoring of the public health, public safety and broader social effects of legalization are essential to minimizing harms and maximizing benefits.

### Cannabis Act Legislative Review

The *Cannabis Act* requires the Minister of Health to review the effects of the act and its administration three years after coming into force. The review is in progress and will examine the effects on public health, mental health, health and consumption patterns of young persons, effects on Indigenous people and communities, and home cultivation.

## Key Findings Affecting Policy Development

- There has been a dramatic reduction in cannabis-related charges since legalization.



- **Risks to Children and Youth:** Evidence shows risks to children and youth that may need future consideration from a policy development perspective, including:
  - More youth than adults who already use cannabis reporting an increase in their use during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - An increase in cannabis vaping, with higher rates among youth and young adults; and
  - An increase in cannabis-related emergency department visits and hospitalizations for children following the introduction of edibles to the legal market.
- **Cannabis Market:**
  - Despite some month-to-month fluctuation, the legal retail cannabis market continues to grow and remains years away from stability, particularly with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - Legal retail sales continue to capture an increasing share of the market. Growing consumer preferences for legal cannabis sources shows relative success in diversion from the illicit market.
- **Product Formats:**
  - Dried cannabis remains dominant, with edibles experiencing the most rapid increase in units sold, closely followed by extracts.
  - The introduction of new product formats brought new challenges to determining equivalencies for possession limits. There is considerable variation in product composition (i.e., the amount of tetrahydrocannabinol, cannabidiol and other cannabinoids and terpenes) resulting in significant variation across product types in intoxication potential, health risks and monetary value in the permitted possession limit.

## Reference

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (2022). *Cannabis legalization: 2021–2022 observations*. Ottawa, Ont.: Author. <https://www.ccsa.ca/cannabis-legalization-2021-2022-observations-policy-brief>

