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Daily cannabis use surpasses daily drinking among Canadians under 50, study finds

An analysis of nearly 100,000 survey responses suggests frequent cannabis use has become routine for younger adults since legalization

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Daily cannabis use has overtaken daily alcohol use among Canadians younger than 50, according to a survey analysis published in CMAJ that drew on responses from nearly 100,000 people collected in 2023 and 2024.

The finding marks a notable shift in substance use patterns in a country where alcohol has long been more common in everyday life than cannabis. The researchers found that among people under 50, using cannabis every day was more common than drinking alcohol every day. The study did not conclude that people were directly replacing alcohol with cannabis, and it did not establish a cause-and-effect link between the two behaviors.

The analysis was based on recent survey data from across Canada, giving researchers a broad look at how often adults reported using cannabis and alcohol. The results point to a generational divide in daily consumption habits, with younger and middle-aged adults showing patterns that differ from older Canadians. While alcohol remains widely used, the study suggests that daily cannabis use now occupies a larger place than daily drinking for many adults below age 50.

That shift carries public health implications and may influence how officials interpret patterns of use, even though the survey did not measure quantities consumed or clinical outcomes. Researchers said the results should not be read as proof that cannabis is displacing alcohol in a simple one-for-one way. Instead, the data show that frequent cannabis use has become more common in a large segment of the population and now exceeds daily drinking in that age group.

The study adds to a growing body of evidence showing that cannabis has become a more routine part of life for some Canadians since legalization. But the authors were careful about what the survey can and cannot show. Because the analysis relied on self-reported responses collected at a given point in time, it cannot determine whether one substance caused a decline in use of the other, or whether broader social, economic, and cultural changes are reshaping both habits at once.

The findings also matter beyond public health. For brewers, wineries, distillers, bars and other beverage businesses, the results may offer another sign that consumption patterns among younger adults are changing in ways that could affect long-term

demand for alcoholic drinks. That does not mean cannabis is definitively taking sales away from beer, wine or spirits, and the study does not make that claim. But it suggests a shift in everyday behavior that producers and retailers will likely watch closely as they assess how younger consumers choose among legal intoxicants.

In Canada, where both alcohol and cannabis are legal for adults subject to provincial rules, policymakers and health officials have been trying to understand how access, social acceptance and price shape patterns of use. A move toward more frequent cannabis use among adults under 50 could influence discussions about prevention, education and treatment, especially if regular use becomes normalized in the same way daily drinking once was in some settings.

The survey’s large sample size strengthens its value as a snapshot of current behavior, but it still has limits. Self-reported substance use can be undercounted or misreported, and survey data do not always capture important details such as quantity consumed, product potency or the context in which use occurs. Those details would be needed to assess differences in use more precisely.

Even with those cautions, the results underscore how quickly consumer habits can change. For policymakers and health officials, the rise in daily cannabis use may warrant closer attention to changing patterns of self-reported use. For the alcohol industry, it may signal that future growth cannot be understood only through traditional drinking trends. And for researchers, the study points to the need for more work on whether the rise in cannabis use is happening alongside reduced drinking, separate from it, or in combination with other changes in how Canadians use intoxicating substances.