



# Veterans' Knowledge and Perceptions About Cannabis



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## Background

- Over the past decade, cannabis use has increased substantially among U.S. adults.
- Among U.S. veterans, increasing rates of cannabis use and cannabis use disorder are well documented. Use of cannabis for medicinal purposes is double that of non-veterans.
- Despite the increase in cannabis usage, data about veterans' knowledge, perceptions, and usage patterns is limited.

## Methods

- IRB approved **cross-sectional cohort study** of **206 veterans** at **Boston VA** in inpatient psychiatry units and residential programs.
- Anonymous survey; each volunteer given a \$5 gift card.
- Survey responses analyzed using SAS version 9.3.
- Summary statistics generated using percentages, means, categorical variables tested using Chi Square.

## Results

### Characteristics of the Sample

Age	18-64 years old (76%); 65+ years old (24%)
Gender	174 Male (88%), 20 Female (10%), 3 Other (2%)
Education	Some HS or HS graduate (34%) Some college, college, or graduate degree ( <b>66%</b> )
Substance Use History	Past Year Use: Tobacco (75%), Alcohol (65%), Illicit Drug Use (48.5%), <b>Cannabis use (72%)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>23% used cannabis &gt; 10,000 times in their life</li> </ul>

### Perceived health & past year cannabis use

Perceived Health Questions	r-value	p-value
Physical health	0.047	.519
Mental health	0.003	.968
Quality of life	-0.0003	.996

## Results

### How does early usage of cannabis affect current drug use?

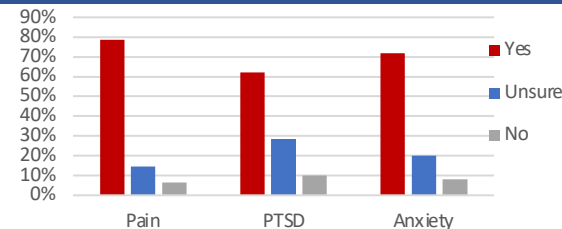
- 62%** reported first using cannabis between ages 0-17.
- Initiating cannabis between ages 0-17** was significantly associated with a **greater percentage of current substance use** for tobacco, alcohol, cannabis use for non-medical reasons, and other illicit drug use.

### Perceptions of safety & general knowledge:

	Agree % (n)	Disagree % (n)	Undecided % (n)
"It is safe to drive after consuming cannabis"	22 (44)	<b>49 (97)</b>	28 (56)
"Cannabis use can have permanent effects on the brain"	<b>39 (78)</b>	26 (52)	34 (68)
"Cannabis is more potent than it was in the past"	<b>67 (135)</b>	13 (27)	19 (39)
"Opioids are more dangerous than cannabis"	<b>83 (166)</b>	11 (23)	6 (12)
"CBD is safer than THC"	<b>62 (108)</b>	38 (66)	n/a
"CBD and THC come from the same plant"	<b>78 (139)</b>	22 (39)	n/a
"Cannabis is bad for people's health"	28 (36)	68 (136)	14 (27)
"Long term use of medical marijuana is very safe."	53 (103)	17 (33)	30 (58)

## Results

### Perceptions of medicinal uses: "Is cannabis an effective treatment for...?"



## Discussion

- Many veterans hospitalized on inpatient psychiatric wards have used cannabis in the past year. Almost one-quarter reported using >10,000 times in their life.
- There was no significant correlation between extent of use and perceived health.
- Initiating cannabis at a younger age was associated with a significantly greater percentage of current substance use.
- Veterans possessed experiential knowledge but lacked an evidence-based understanding about cannabis.
- Although cannabis use has been associated with impaired driving, only half of veterans felt it was unsafe to drive under the influence.
- Veterans generally felt cannabis is safe, although some were undecided about the safety and efficacy of cannabis.
- Most participants felt cannabis is an effective treatment for pain, PTSD, and anxiety, despite conflicting evidence supporting its usage for these conditions.
- Cannabis education should begin early in life. Continuing education should be incorporated into inpatient unit group curriculum.

## References

