

Medical cannabis use amongst older Australians: findings from an anonymous online survey

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Introduction: Medical cannabis is popular amongst people aged 65 and over in Australia. Evidence suggests the benefits and risks of medical cannabis may differ between older and younger adults, but many potential differences remain understudied.

Methods: Data came from the online, anonymous, Cannabis as Medicine Survey (CAMS) conducted in 2022-2023. Participants were Australian adults who had used medical cannabis in the last year. Single level regressions compared respondents aged 65+ and 18-64 across health, patterns of use, side effects, and beliefs and attitudes.

Results: Of 4453 respondents, 303 (7%) were over 65. People aged 65+ were more likely to be treating pain (OR = 1.9, CI = 1.4, 2.5), orally administer medical cannabis (OR = 4.4, CI = 3.0, 6.3), use CBD-containing products (OR = 3.3, CI = 2.0, 5.5), experience dizziness (OR = 1.5, CI = 1.1, 2.2) and gastro-intestinal irritation (OR = 1.7, CI = 1.1, 2.7) as side effects, and believe that cannabis should only be legal for medical purposes (OR = 3.0, CI = 2.0, 4.6). They were less likely to meet cannabis use disorder criteria (OR = 0.3, CI = 0.2, 0.5) and to have driven while under the influence of cannabis (OR = 0.5, CI = 0.3, 0.7).

Discussions and Conclusions: Older people are a distinct category of medical cannabis consumers, with different behaviours, experiences, and beliefs. They were generally more risk averse in their medical cannabis use but were more prone to some negative side effects.

Implications on practice and policy: Health professionals should consider age as an important factor in the suitability of medical cannabis for a patient, before medical advice and prescription.

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