

# Prevalence and self-reported reasons of cannabis use for medicinal purposes in Australia

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## Introduction:

Recent changes in Australia's medicinal cannabis policy have led to a rapid increase in cannabis prescriptions for various conditions, despite a lack of evidence supporting its effectiveness for many of these conditions. The current study aimed to examine the epidemiology of self-reported cannabis use for medical purposes by: (1) estimating the self-reported prevalence of cannabis use for medical purposes in Australia, (2) comparing the prevalence of cannabis use by gender, age, income and education, and (3) investigating which health conditions medical cannabis was self-reported to manage.

## Method:

Data from the 2023 International Cannabis Policy Study (ICPS) were collected via web-based surveys in Autumn 2023. A non-probability sample of respondents ( $N = 3,042$ ) was recruited by Nielsen Consumer Insights Global Panel. The cooperation rate was 55.1%. Post-stratification sample weights were constructed based on the Australian estimates for 2023 and applied to the data. Weighted prevalence was computed to estimate the proportion of medical only, dual and recreational only use. Multinomial logistic regression was used to estimate the relationships between socio-demographic variables and cannabis use type (i.e., medicinal only, dual use).

## Results:

Respondents ( $N = 3,042$ ) were aged 16-65 ( $M = 39.9$ ,  $SD = 0.3$ ) & 50.1% were female at birth. The prevalence of medical only cannabis use was 13.2% [95% CI:(10.6-16.3)] and dual use (medical and recreational purposes) was 34.3% [CI:(30.4-38.4)] in Australia. The proportion of medical and dual use respondents who treated a mental health condition with medicinal cannabis was 19.8%(18.3-21.3). The proportion of medical and dual use respondents who treated a physical health condition with medicinal cannabis was 19.4% (18.0-20.9).

## Discussions and Conclusions:

Many people in Australia who have used cannabis to treat medical conditions are doing so for ailments where there is a lack of robust efficacy, particularly for mental health conditions where cannabis may exacerbate symptoms.

## Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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