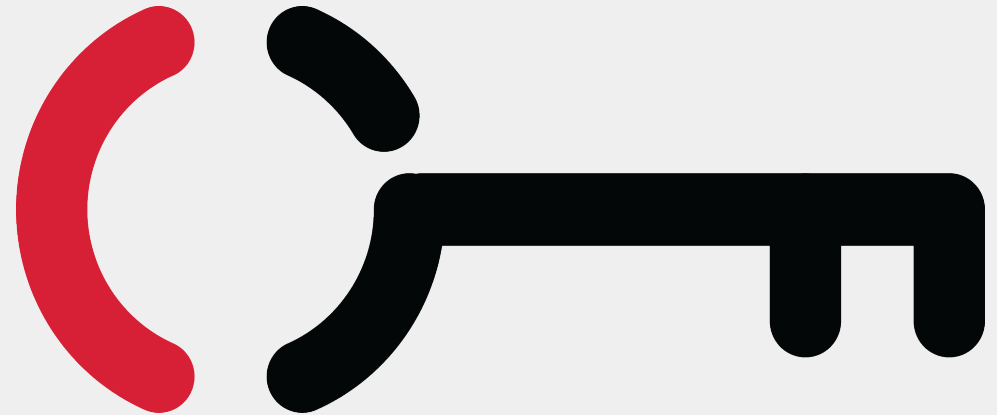


Cannabis Legalisation Outcomes

A rapid review of the evidence

Robert Taylor – Manager, Policy
& Engagement



Acknowledgements

- Authoring team: Liana Rawlings, Linda Gay, Robert Taylor, Aaron Bachelor, Elle Perriman, Inez Winters, Dr Nataly Bovopoulos and Yujie Zhao
- External expert consultants: Prof Simon Lenton and Dr Claire Wilkinson
- ADF Directors: Prof Steve Allsop, Prof Kylie Lee and Assoc Prof Michael Livingston
- Completed June 2024
- No conflicts to declare



Background

- ADF existing position supports decriminalisation of possession of personal use quantities of all substances
- No previous organisational review of the evidence on alternative models of cannabis regulation.
- Growing relevance
 - increasing adoption of cannabis law reform internationally,
 - growing social acceptance and support of cannabis legalisation domestically,
 - increasing domestic political movements for regulation, and
 - emerging research on outcomes of cannabis legalisation,



Aims and scope

- Rapid review aimed to:
 - conduct a systematic search and critical appraisal of the available literature
 - synthesise relevant findings across multiple outcomes
 - report on the quality of available evidence, including strengths, weaknesses, limitations and any identified gaps.

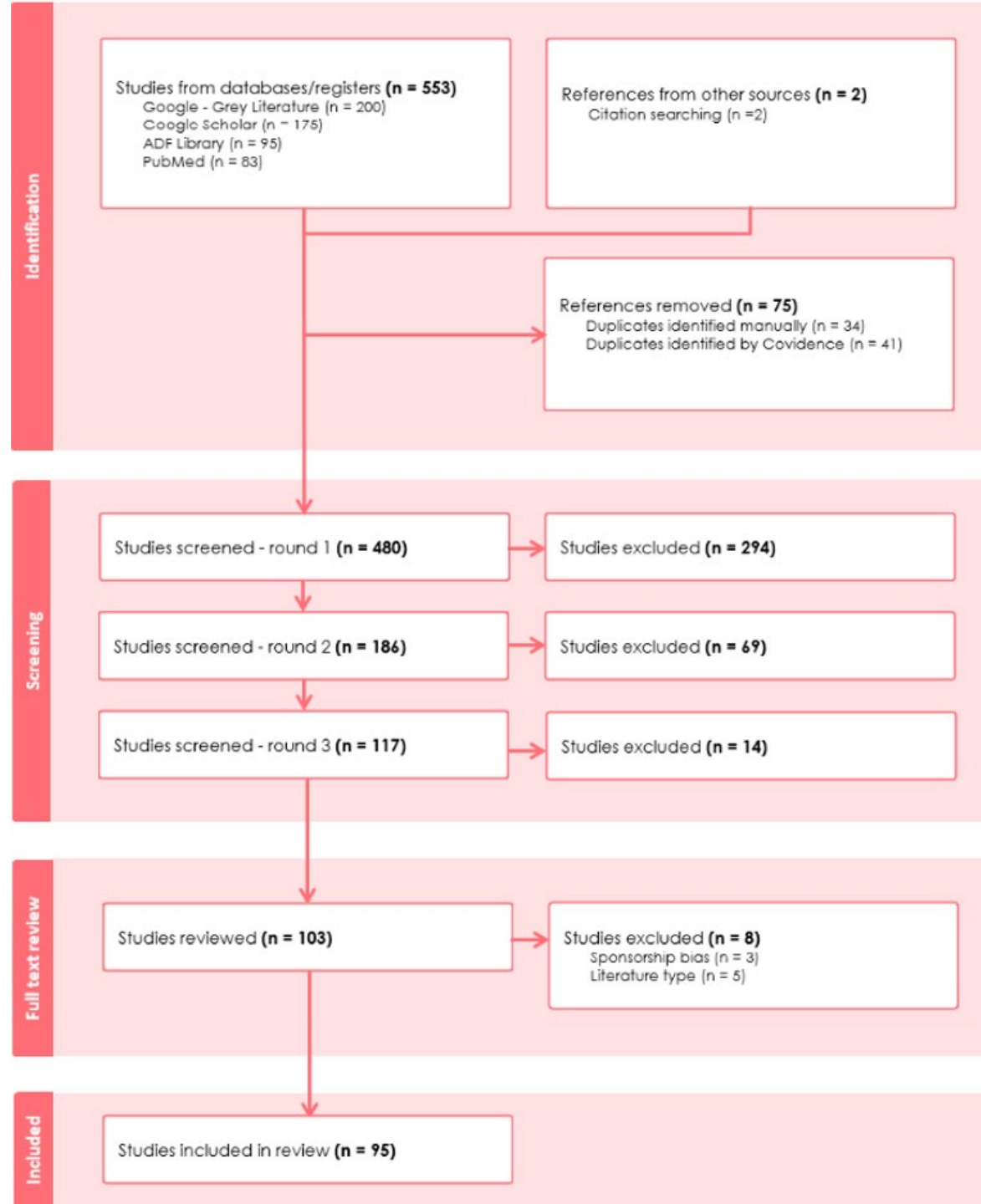


Research Questions

- **Main question:** What are the impacts of different models of cannabis legalisation?
- **Sub-questions:** what are the impacts of different models of cannabis legalisation on
 - cannabis use rates and cannabis use disorders
 - mental and physical health harms
 - social harms and stigma
 - legal harms
 - cannabis markets?



Studies included



Key findings:

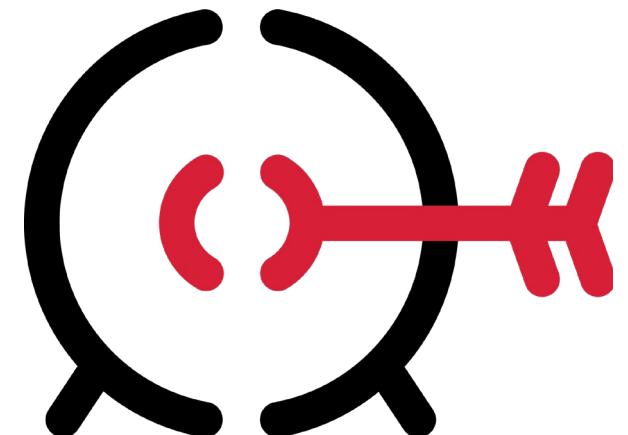
- **Growing body of evidence of mixed quality**
 - Weaknesses include
 - failure to control for confounding variables
 - limited time periods
 - Difficulty classifying models of regulation and associating with outcomes
 - Evidence is concentrated in North America
 - Some trends emerged despite the mixed quality of evidence

Category	Total (n = 95)	%
Design		
Systematic Review	10	11%
Systematic Review & meta-analysis	2	2%
Other reviews	3	3%
Peer-reviewed single studies	73	77%
RCT	0	0%
Grey literature	7	7%
Design Grade		
High	13	14%
Moderate	0	0%
Low	72	76%
Very Low	10	11%
Country/Regions		
US	57	60%
Canada	20	21%
North America	15	16%
Uruguay	2	2%
Europe	1	1%
Thailand	1	1%
Publication year		
2019	7	7%
2020	13	14%
2021	20	21%
2022	29	31%
2023	26	27%
Relevancy to research sub-questions		
1: cannabis use and CUD	34	36%
2: mental and physical health harms	47	49%
3: social harms and stigma	14	15%
4: legal harms	23	24%
5: cannabis markets	19	20%

Key findings:

Impact on cannabis use rates and Cannabis Use Disorder (CUD)

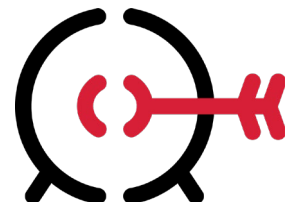
- Adolescents:
 - Overall, studies found limited evidence of increases in cannabis use and CUD following legalisation
 - Some inconsistencies, but higher quality studies tended towards no change
- Young adults and older adults:
 - Increased cannabis use
 - Impacts on risky use and CUD less clear



Key findings:

Health harms

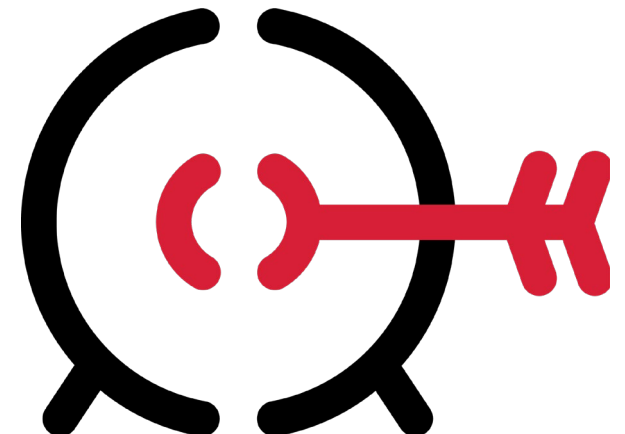
- Road safety: Modest increase, especially following commercialisation. Evidence inconsistent and limited (study design and toxicology issues).
- Emergency department: Increase in poisoning of young cohorts re legal edibles / retail availability. Mixed for adult presentations
- Opioids: Inconsistent but early findings support a potential decrease in opioid prescribing and medication use.
- Mental health and treatment: Further research needed to substantiate indicative findings of harm in young people



Key findings:

Social harms

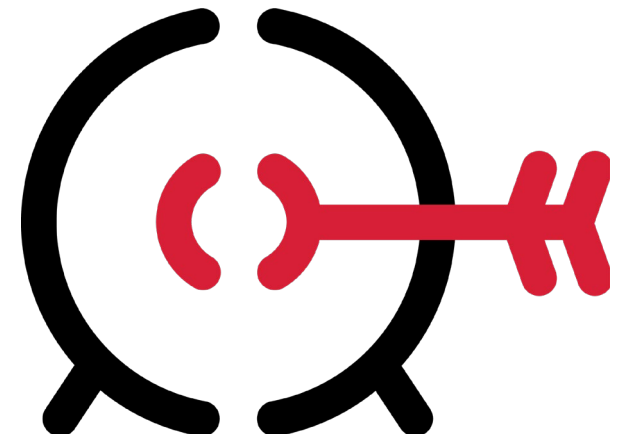
- Perceptions:
 - Potential decline in perceptions of risks and harm. Varied across studies and populations.
- Community:
 - Preliminary findings suggest harms from increased outlet density in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods, lack of consumption spaces.



Key findings:

Impact on markets

- Products (prices and potency):
 - Consistent findings of overall decline in prices and increase in potency following legalisation (mediated by regulation).
- Purchasing behaviour:
 - Less consistent evidence, but overall, see a shift in consumer sourcing of cannabis products from illegal to legal markets.
 - Existing research examines factors relating to shifts to the legal market (price, convenience, product types etc.)



Conclusions

- Longer term data is needed to establish clearer relationships between regulatory approaches and outcomes
- Findings suggest increased commercialisation is associated with higher harms, mirroring some evidence from alcohol and tobacco
- There is a lack of evidence on outcomes of non-commercial models of regulation
- Implications for policy and advocacy include the need to minimise commercial determinants of health in cannabis markets

