How Australians' medical cannabis use has changed since deregulation: Results from the Cannabis As Medicine Surveys (CAMS).

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Introduction: It has been seven years since the Australian Federal Parliament legalised cannabis use for medical purposes. Since 2016 our study group have conducted the Cannabis As Medicine Surveys (CAMS) to report on the experiences of our nation's medical cannabis users, and track the changes in the medical cannabis (MC) landscape since deregulation.

Method: Cross-sectional anonymous online surveys were administered biennially 2016-2022. Adult Australian residents who had used a cannabis product to treat a medical condition–either self-prescribed or prescribed by a medical professional–in the previous year were asked a range of questions including demographics, conditions treated, source and patterns of MC use, and perspectives on accessing MC.

Key Findings: The proportion of CAMS respondents accessing MC legally has increased dramatically, from <1% in CAMS-2016 and CAMS-2018, to 67% in CAMS-2022, with downstream effects for other CAMS variables. The proportion of respondents who mainly use MC to treat a pain condition has risen across the surveys, while the proportion who use it to treat a mental health condition has reduced. The average age respondents first used cannabis for any reason has risen, as has the proportion who had never used cannabis before using it medicinally. Respondents are smoking less, using oral forms more, and more are discussing their use with healthcare providers. Little change was observed across the surveys in participants' ratings of effectiveness or side effects of medication. Cost is still a barrier to many accessing prescribed MC.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Accessing MC legally has meant consumers coming into contact with medical professionals. Associated with this increased contact, consumers are using MC to treat conditions for which there is better evidence of effectiveness and are administering it via safer routes. The harm minimisation implicit in deregulation has resulted in better outcomes for consumers.

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