Self-reported reasons for medical and nonmedical cannabis use in Australia: findings from the 2023 International Cannabis Policy Study

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Introduction: Australia's medicinal cannabis (MC) framework has expanded rapidly, becoming increasingly commercialised. This study aimed to estimate the proportion of cannabis use for different motives among Australian adults at a critical point in cannabis policy evolution, while also exploring the health conditions for which MC was reported to treat.

Method: Cross-sectional data from the 2023 International Cannabis Policy Study, an online survey of respondents aged 16-65 years (*N*=3042) was adjusted with post-stratification sample weights to estimate the proportions of cannabis use in the Australian wave. Multinomial and logistic regression models examined demographic correlates of cannabis use motives and reported conditions for use.

Results: Most respondents reported no past-year cannabis use(86.3%). Only 1.9% reported medical-only use, 6.7% reported recreational-only use and 5.0% reported dual use. Among past year consumers, recreational-only use was most common(49.0%), followed by dual use(36.8%) and medical-only use(14.1%). The most commonly reported indications were anxiety(64.3%), pain(52.9%), depression(52.3%) and sleep problems(48.0%). Having dual use motives, compared with medical-only, was associated with using MC for sleep problems, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Discussions and Conclusions: MC was predominantly used to manage conditions for which high-quality evidence of efficacy remains limited. The high proportion of dual use motives raises concerns about therapeutic boundaries and use beyond prescription intent.

Implications on communities, practice, policy and/or First Nations communities: The findings support stronger clinician education and regulatory oversight to ensure MC prescribing in Australia is aligned with high-quality evidence.

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