

Study indicates rates of problem marijuana use are rising among seniors

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As marijuana use becomes legal and more accepted across America, more seniors are developing unhealthy relationships with the drug, a new report suggests.

A look at data on almost 56 million Medicare beneficiaries finds "rates of health care encounters with [cannabis](#)-related disorders increased from 2017 through 2022," according to a study led by Dr. Silvia Perez-Vilar, of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

The FDA team's analysis included all Medicare recipients except nursing home residents. It focused on Medicare claims mentioning any medical incident linked to cannabis use.

The numbers showed a steady increase in cannabis-linked medical care among seniors over the five years of the study.

By 2022, "rates were greatest in states or territories with both adult and medical use legalization," the team found, with about 45 such cases recorded for every 10,000 Medicare claims.

Rates of cannabis-linked claims were slightly lower in states where [medical marijuana](#) was legal, but [recreational use](#) was not (41.5 cases per 10,000).

In states where [marijuana use](#) was still illegal for either recreational or medical reasons, the rate of weed-linked claims among seniors fell to 27.7 cases per 10,000, Perez-Vilar's team said.

Experts have [voiced concerns](#) over the rise in addictions and mental health crises linked to highly potent cannabis in the past few years, mainly among the young. For example, [one recent study](#) found that teens who use cannabis face 11 times the odds for a psychotic episode compared to teens who abstain from the drug.

The new study suggests that these dangers may extend to [older adults](#).

"Overall, data suggest that increasing rates of health care encounters

documenting cannabis-related disorders among older adults might be associated with the type of cannabis legalization," the FDA team said.

The findings were [published](#) June 18 in the journal *JAMA Network Open*.

More information: Silvia Perez-Vilar et al, State Cannabis Legalization and Trends in Cannabis-Related Disorders in US Older Adults, 2017 to 2022, *JAMA Network Open* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.17634](#)

Find out more about the potential health harms of cannabis use at the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#).

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