

# Study reveals rapid increases in cannabis use among individuals with depression

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Results of a new study suggest that over the past decade (2005-2017), the prevalence of cannabis use in the United States has increased among persons with and without depression, though the increase is significantly

more rapid among those with depression. At the same time, the perception of risks associated with cannabis use have declined overall, and the decline has been more rapid among those with depression. The findings, which are published in *Addiction*, come from a survey-based study of 728,691 persons aged 12 years or older.

In 2017, cannabis use was approximately twice as common among those with depression. Perception of risks associated with cannabis use has appeared to act as a barrier to cannabis use in the general population.

"The prevalence of cannabis use among those with depression who perceived no risk associated with regular use was much higher than among those who perceived significant risk associated with use—39 percent versus 1.6 percent, respectively," said corresponding author Renee Goodwin, Ph.D., of Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health and The City University of New York. "With increasing legalization in the U.S., previous studies have shown that perception of risk associated with use is declining overall. The results of this study show that this decline is even more rapid among this vulnerable population: those with depression."

In 2017, the prevalence of past month cannabis use was 19 percent among those with depression and 9 percent among those without depression. Daily cannabis use was common among 7 percent of those with depression and among 3 percent of those without it.

Certain groups appeared more vulnerable to use. For instance, nearly one third of young adults (30 percent) aged 18 to 25 with depression reported past 30-day use. "As brain development is ongoing until at least age 25, and young persons with depression are especially vulnerable, this is a group who may need attention in terms of prevention and intervention," noted Goodwin.

"Depression is not generally a condition for which medicinal cannabis is prescribed, and it is not clear why recreational use would occur disproportionately among those with depression," observed Goodwin. "It is conceivable that cannabis may be increasingly used in an attempt to self-medicate depression in states where it is legal for recreational use."

**More information:** Lauren R. Pacek et al, Rapid increase in the prevalence of cannabis use among persons with depression in the U.S., 2005-2017: the role of differentially changing risk perceptions, *Addiction* (2019). DOI: [10.1111/add.14883](https://doi.org/10.1111/add.14883)

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

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