

PAEDIATRIC RESIDENT ADVOCACY GRANT- FINAL REPORT

Youth and Cannabis: An Educational Video
Is it worth the high?

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Background

Cannabis is a ubiquitous recreational drug used worldwide (Grant & Belanger, 2017). A 2010 WHO study revealed that 33% of Canadian youth under age 15 admitted to having used cannabis on at least one occasion; this represents the highest rates of cannabis use among youth worldwide (Currie et al., 2012). Unfortunately, Northern Ontario has some of the highest rates of cannabis dependency amongst youth province wide (Boak et al., 2020). The rates of cannabis use amongst Canada's Indigenous youth are especially concerning. A recent systematic review suggested that 45% of all Indigenous youth grades 9-12 had used cannabis on at least one occasion (Wennberg et al., 2021). There has also been a decrease in the perceived harm of cannabis use with the legalization and increased commercialization of the product. This has been correlated with trends of increased cannabis use, especially among youth (Colorado Department of Public Safety, 2016). Considering that brain development and maturation continues until age 25, youth who use cannabis are especially vulnerable to the adverse effects of THC (Grant & Belanger, 2017). These effects include impaired neurodevelopment, cannabis intoxication, dependency, increased prevalence of mental illness, lower academic and life achievement, and increased high-risk behaviours such as cannabis-impaired driving or use of other substances (Grant & Belanger, 2017). Despite the observed trends in cannabis use, there are limited youth-targeted educational resources that highlight the risks associated with cannabis use or that offer harm-reduction strategies.

Objectives

Through a youth-targeted educational video we aim to:

- (1) Highlight the risks and adverse effects associated with cannabis use in youth and adolescents
- (2) Offer harm reduction strategies to youth who choose to continue to use cannabis

Project Implementation

Justification: "*Is it worth the high?*" is an advocacy project of a group of fourth-year undergraduate medical students (now PGY1s) from the Northern Ontario School of Medicine University (NOSMU). NOSMU has an advocacy curriculum which encourages fourth-year students to engage in advocating for various areas of medicine in which they have observed gaps in the equity, quality, or procedure of care during their time as a medical learner. After observing the high incidence of cannabis use in youth and its deleterious effects in our practice as medical students, we were inspired to create an advocacy project with the aim to communicate evidence-based information on cannabis use to youth and adolescents in an age-appropriate manner. The target audience is youth aged 12-18 years.

Funding: This project was made possible through funding obtained through the Healthy Generations Paediatric Resident Advocacy Grant and through advocacy funding offered through NOSMU. Funding has allowed us to collaborate with a video animator to create the educational video.

Video Production: We performed a review of the literature on the effects of cannabis use in youth and adolescents and collaboratively developed a script for the video. The script was developed using evidence-based information and guidelines available on the Government of

Canada website and through the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS). With recent trends showing an increase in use and decrease in the perceived risks of cannabis, harm reduction strategies are a key focus in the video to minimize the negative effects of cannabis on the developing brains of youth. It also offers education on the short- and long-term effects of cannabis use. The script was reviewed and approved by a supervising staff community paediatrician prior to the creation of the video. We then had the animated video produced with age-appropriate imagery to keep youth engaged. At 4:55 minutes in length, the video was made to deliver information in a digestible format for youth and be shared on various social media platforms to maximize outreach.

Video Dissemination

The video was reviewed, edited, and approved by NOSMU, Healthy Generations, and the CPS prior to dissemination. For video dissemination, we partnered with the following organizations:

- (1) *NOSM University*. The video has been posted to NOSM's social media platforms and Youtube channel (NOSMtv) where it currently has 3,063 views at the time of this report.
- (2) *CTV News*. NOSM facilitated a CTV North news interview with two group members to promote the video which aired on our local regional news station.
- (3) *Regional Public Health Units*. We partnered with regional health units in Northern Ontario including Algoma Public Health, Public Health Sudbury & Districts and Thunder Bay District Health Unit who made news releases on their respective websites to promote the video.
- (4) *Canadian Paediatric Society*. The video is available through the CPS website under "Cannabis>>Information for Parents".
- (5) We shared the video with regional community pediatric groups, as well as with the local child and adolescent psychiatry team in Thunder Bay for use as an additional educational resource with patients.

Challenges

Some challenges that we encountered during the creation of this educational video was developing a resource that was comprehensive but also engaging to our audience. Including sufficient information to communicate our message while limiting the length of the video proved to be difficult; however we refined the goal of our messaging to focus on the key risks and ultimately harm reduction strategies to optimally convey our message.

Next Steps

As we continue into our new careers as first-year residents, we aim to continue working on this advocacy project and increasing outreach of the video to spread our message. After the launch of the video, we also had overwhelming feedback that our community partners were interested in a French version of the video given the high Francophone population in Northern Ontario. We have therefore identified the following as our next steps in this advocacy project:

1. We are currently in the production phase of the French version of the video. We intend to have NOSMU, Healthy Generations, and the CPS review the French version of the video for edits and approval prior to its release.
2. We hope to disseminate the French version of the video via the same channels as the English video. We aim to do a “re-launch” of the English video at the same time to maximize outreach. Our timeline for the release of this video is December 2022.

Acknowledgements:

We would like to sincerely thank Healthy Generations for choosing our project as the 2022 recipient of the Paediatric Resident Advocacy Grant. The funding and support provided by Healthy Generations has allowed us to create a resource which will hopefully help improve the health of youth and adolescents in our region and beyond. We would also like to acknowledge the support provided by NOSMU faculty and staff who assisted with obtaining internal funding, reviewing the video script, and to Francophone Affairs for reviewing our translated video. Thank you to Dr. Marie Albert, a Pediatric Resident at NOSMU, who graciously assisted with the French video production. Finally, thank you to our community partners, including the Cannabis Project Advocacy Group through the CPS for your support in offering input and assisting with dissemination of the video.

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