

## **Changing trends in attitudes toward cannabis and frequent cannabis use in Australia – the effects of age, period and birth cohort.**

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**Introduction and Aims:** This study examines age, period and birth cohort trends in Australians' attitudes toward cannabis legalisation, cannabis use intention and the frequent use of cannabis.

**Design and Methods:** Seven waves of the National Drug Strategy Household Survey between 2001-2019 were used, included 158,395 participants aged 18-79 years. Hierarchical age-period-cohort models were used to simultaneously assess these effects on the proportion of participants who supported cannabis legalisation, intended to use cannabis and used cannabis frequently over time.

**Results:** The surge in support for legalisation was largely driven by period effect, evident by a significant shift in attitudes since 2007 that increased further between 2013 and 2019. Similarly, since 2010 there has been an increasing trend in the proportion of participants reporting the intention to use cannabis. The proportion of participants who reported using cannabis frequently was relatively stable with only small fluctuations over the study period. We observed a small but consistently increasing period effect in regular use for the years 2016 to 2019 compared to the lowest point in 2013. There were also distinctive inter-generation variations: people born between 1950s-1970s had more liberal views towards cannabis and were more likely to have used cannabis frequently than others born in earlier or later cohorts.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** There has been a population-based shift in favourable attitudes towards cannabis, more so among those born in the 1950s-1970s than other generations. Liberal attitudes and more frequent cannabis use may put certain cohorts at higher risks of cannabis-related harms.

**Implications for Policy:** The increases in recent cannabis use reported after legalisation in the U.S.A. and Canada suggest that there may be similar increases in Australia in the future. We found a small but consistent growth in frequent cannabis use between 2013-2019 warrant monitoring of cannabis consumption and related consequences among users.

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