



# Canadian Substance Use Survey

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Summary of Results 2023



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Canada

**Health Canada is the federal department responsible for helping the people of Canada maintain and improve their health.** Health Canada is committed to improving the lives of all of Canada's people and to making this country's population among the healthiest in the world as measured by longevity, lifestyle and effective use of the public health care system.

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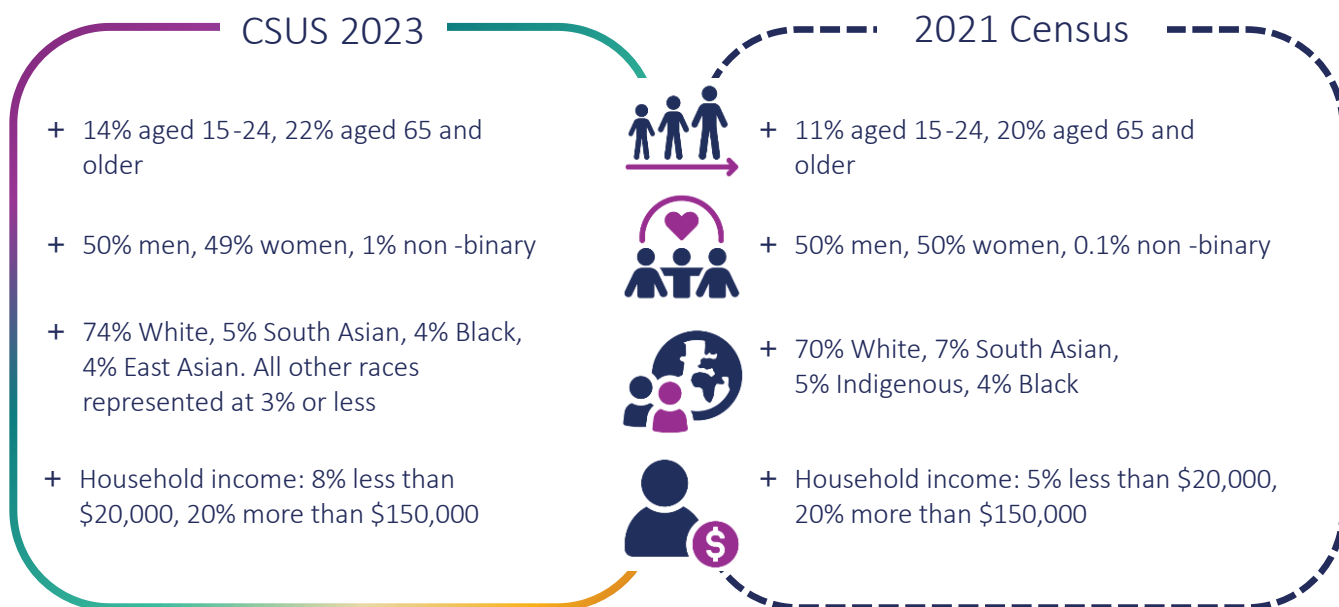


# Background

The Canadian Substance Use Survey (CSUS) (previously the Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey) is conducted every other year by Health Canada (HC). It aims to collect data from people living in Canada to identify the prevalence of and trends in alcohol and drug use. Data from CSUS are used to develop, implement, and evaluate strategies, policies, and programs surrounding alcohol and drug use in Canada. CSUS and its predecessors have been one of Health Canada’s main sources of national substance use data since 2008.

CSUS has evolved over time. Initially, the Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS, 1999 - 2012) measured the use of tobacco and the Canadian Alcohol and Drug Use Monitoring Survey (CADUMS, 2008 - 2012) measured the use of alcohol and drugs. CTUMS and CADUMS were merged into the Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drug Survey (CTADS) in 2013. CTADS was conducted every other year from 2013 to 2017. In 2019, HC separated CTADS into two surveys: the Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CADS), focused on alcohol and drug surveillance, and the Canadian Tobacco and Nicotine Survey (CTNS), focused on tobacco use and vaping. In 2023, CADS was renamed as CSUS following large methodological changes. CSUS 2023 was conducted from May to December 2023.

# Demographics












# Sampling redesign










The method for contacting respondents was changed between CADS 2019 and CSUS 2023. The purpose of the change was to capture more respondents, particularly those aged 15 to 24. Details on changes can be found in the [Technical Notes](#). Due to these changes, we do not recommend comparing results. CSUS 2023 results are stand-alone.

The increased sample size allows us to highlight in this report differences in substance use between adult and youth/young adult populations. It also allows us to report differences in substance use between those with poor or fair self-rated mental health and those with very good or excellent self-rated mental health.

## Sampling redesign

CADS 2019	CSUS 2023
 Households sampled	 Telephone sampling and recruitment
 Recruitment by mail	 Additional youth and young adults from probability panel
 Link to online survey in mailout	 Link sent by text message or email
	 1,303 Youth 15 -19 offered \$20 completion incentive

## Impact of redesign

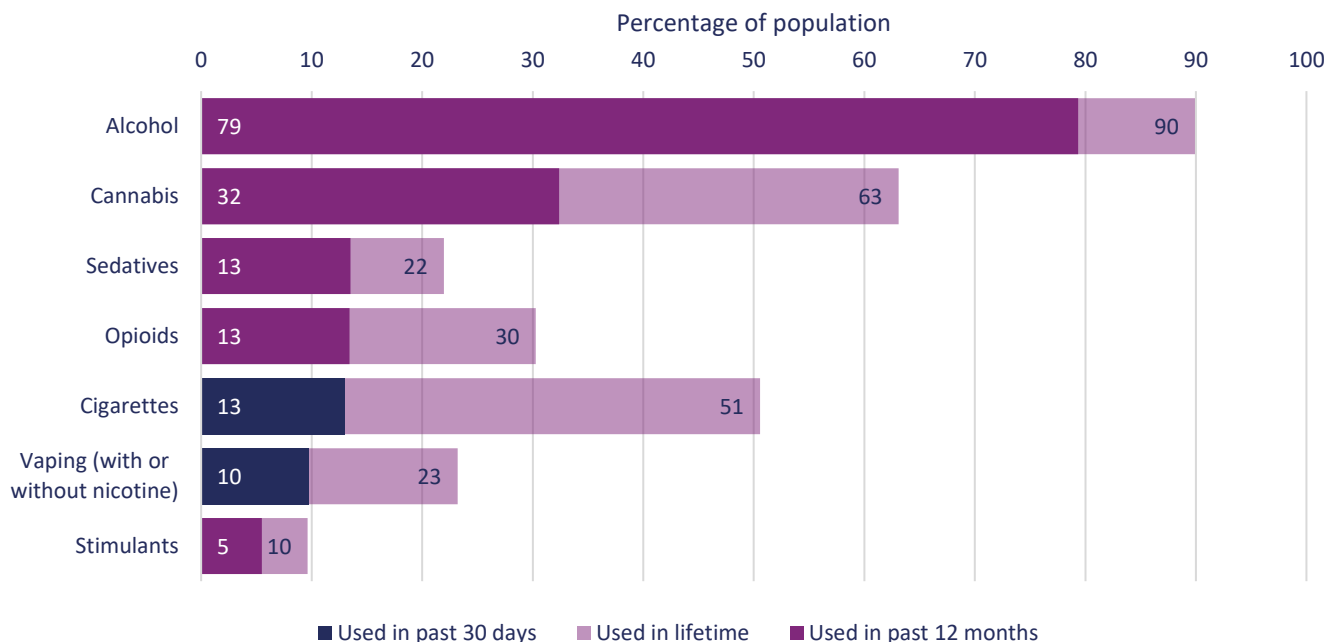
CADS 2019	CSUS 2023
 10,293 respondents	 36,180 respondents
 591 youth and young adults aged 15-24	 7,026 youth and young adults aged 15-24
 Population level results	 Population level results
	 Results with an equity lens
 Minimum 744 respondents per province	 Minimum 2,450 respondents per province



# Substance use among the general population in Canada

## Use of legal substances by the general population

**Figure 1 – Prevalence of use of legal substances - lifetime and past 12 months**

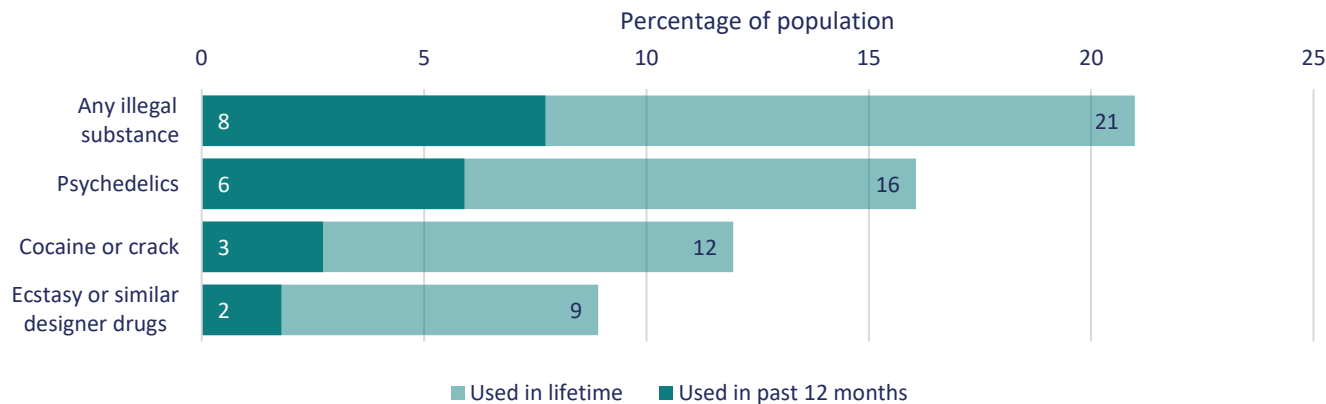


- + Alcohol was the most commonly used substance of interest in the past 12 months, followed by cannabis, then sedatives, opioids, and cigarettes.
- + Most people who had used alcohol in their lifetime also used it in the past 12 months (88%).
- + Among those who had used other legal substances in their lifetime, the percentage who had used them in the past 12 months was: 60% for sedatives, 51% for cannabis, 43% for opioids, and 25% for cigarettes (past 30 days/lifetime).



## Use of illegal substances by the general population

Figure 2 – Prevalence of use of illegal - lifetime and past 12 months



Psychedelics were the most common illegal substance used, followed by cocaine or crack, and ecstasy or similar designer drugs.

Of those who had used any illegal substance in their lifetime, 38% did so in the past 12 months.

<1%

Used amphetamines or methamphetamines, dissociatives, nitrous oxide, salvia, inhalants, heroin, illegal fentanyl, or kratom in 2023.

## Use of two or more substances in combination by the general population (polysubstance use)

Polysubstance use was measured as the use of any substance of interest at the same time or on the same occasion as using alcohol, cannabis, or prescription opioids.

The combinations used most frequently were alcohol when using cannabis (21%), cannabis when using alcohol (20%), and psychedelics when using alcohol (4%).

28%

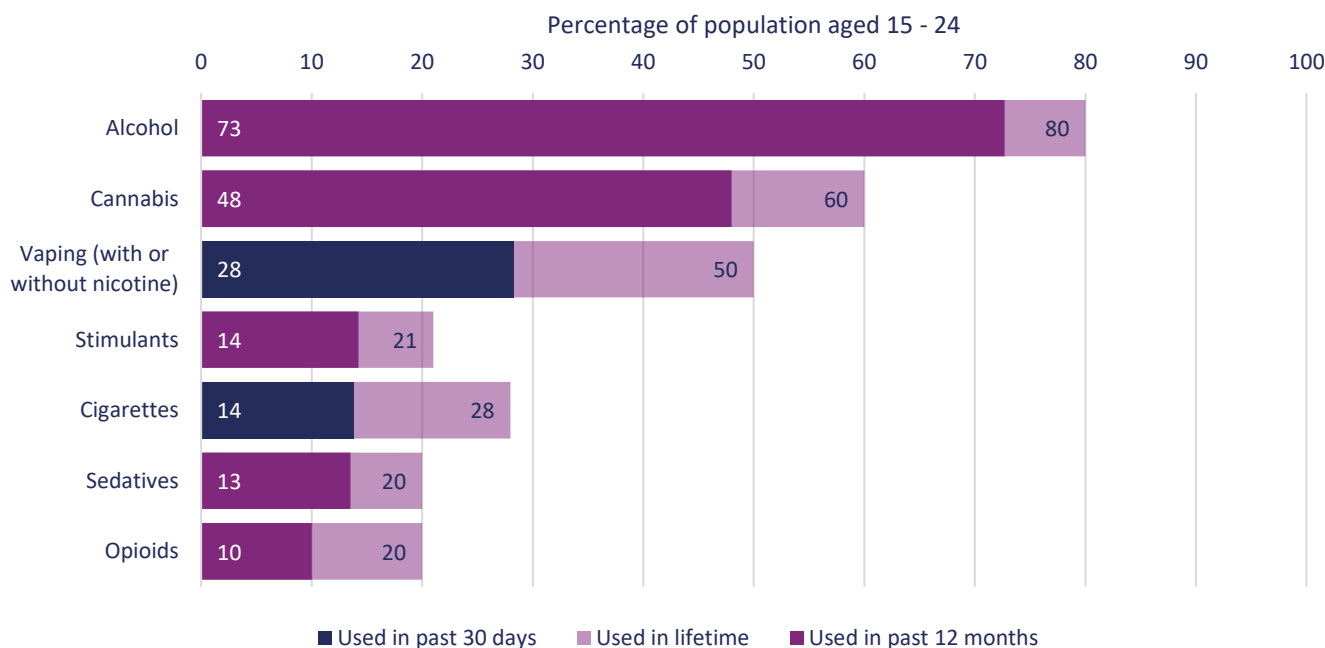
Of people used two or more substances in combination or on the same occasion in the previous 12 months.



# Substance use among youth and young adults in Canada

## Use of legal substances by youth and young adults

**Figure 3 – Prevalence of use of legal substances by youth and young adults - lifetime and past 12 months**



- + In the past 12 months, youth and young adults were slightly less likely to have used alcohol (73%) or pharmaceutical opioids (10%) than adults (80% and 14%, respectively)
- + Youth and young adults were equally as likely as adults (13-14%) to have used sedatives in the past 12 months or have smoked a cigarette in the past 30 days (also 13-14%)
- + Youth and young adults were more likely to have used cannabis (48%), vape products (28% - past 30 days), and stimulants (14%) than adults (30%, 7%, and 4%, respectively)

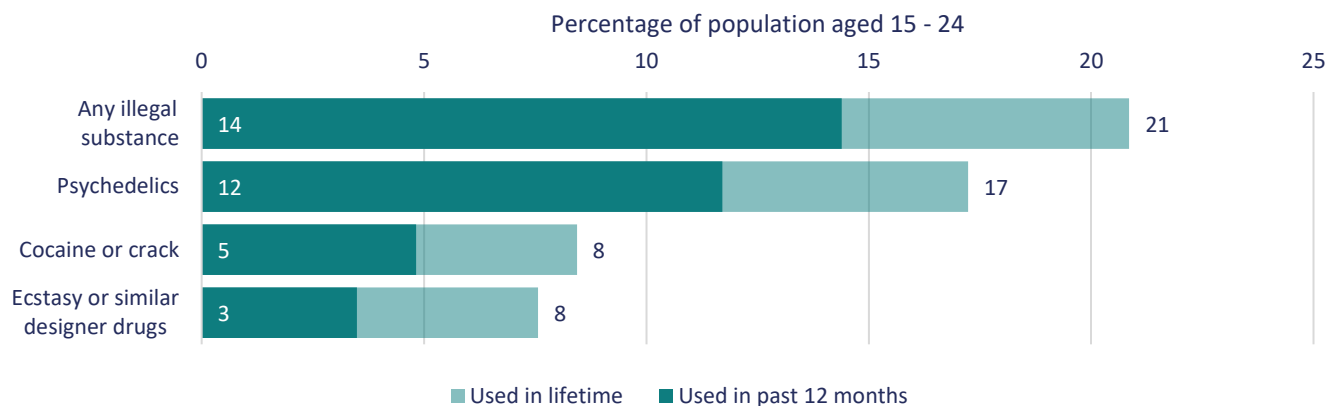
**2-3x**

While the majority of prescription opioids (94%), stimulants (82%), and sedatives (93%) were used for medical purposes, youth and young adults were 2-3 times more likely to have used these products for non-medical purposes than adults.



## Use of illegal substances by youth and young adults

**Figure 4 – Prevalence of illegal substance use by youth and young adults - lifetime and past 12 months**



Youth and young adults were equally as likely to have used an illegal substance in their lifetime as adults (21%). They were also equally likely (16-17%) to have used psychedelics in their lifetime.

>2x

However, youth and young adults were more than twice as likely to have used psychedelics in the past 12 months than adults (5%). Accordingly, the 16% of adults who reported using psychedelics in their lifetime noted that, on average, their first use was at age 20-21.

Youth and young adults were more than twice as likely to have used an illegal drug in the past 12 months than adults – driven by use of psychedelics.

## Use of 2 or more substances in combination by youth and young adults

The most common combinations were alcohol when using cannabis (36%), cannabis when using alcohol (35%), followed by psychedelics when using cannabis (8%) and psychedelics when using alcohol (7%).

42%

of youth and young adults used two or more substances in combination or on the same occasion in the previous 12 months.



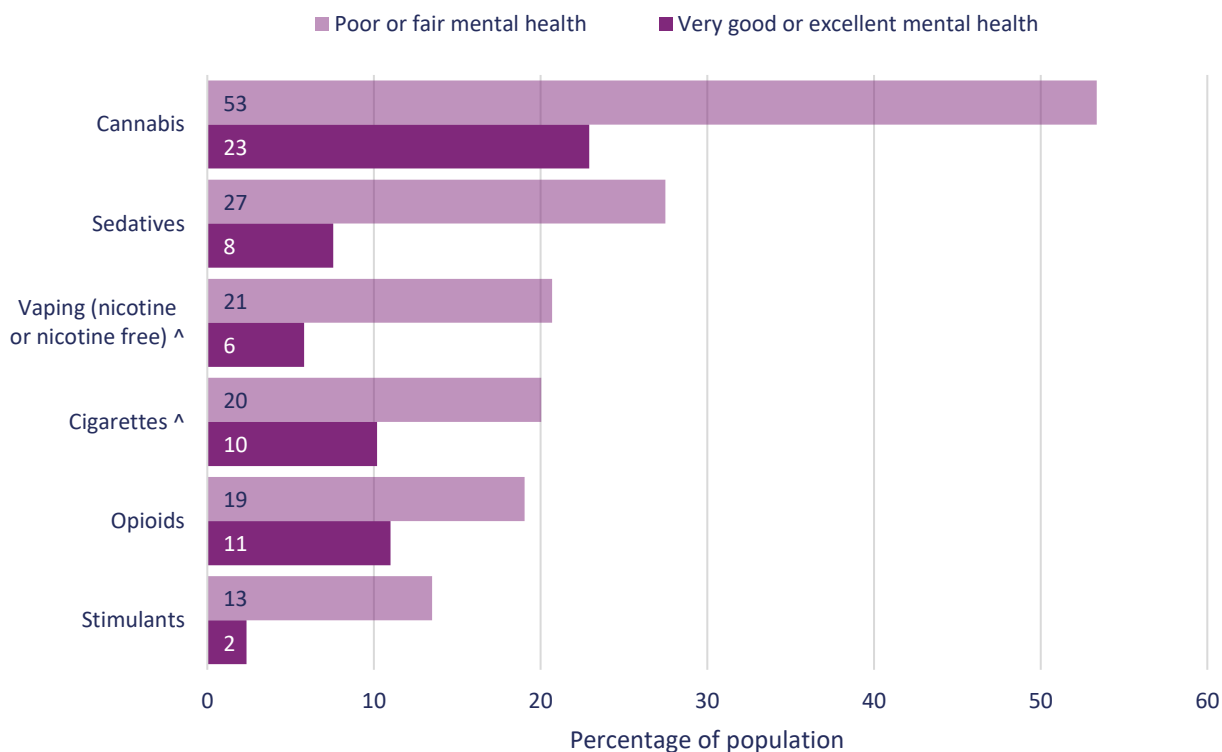


# Mental health and substance use

**18%**

Of people reported that their mental health was poor or fair.

**Figure 5 – Past 12 month legal substance use in Canada, by self-rated mental health**



^ Past 30 day prevalence of cigarette smoking and vaping, compared to past 12 months for other substances



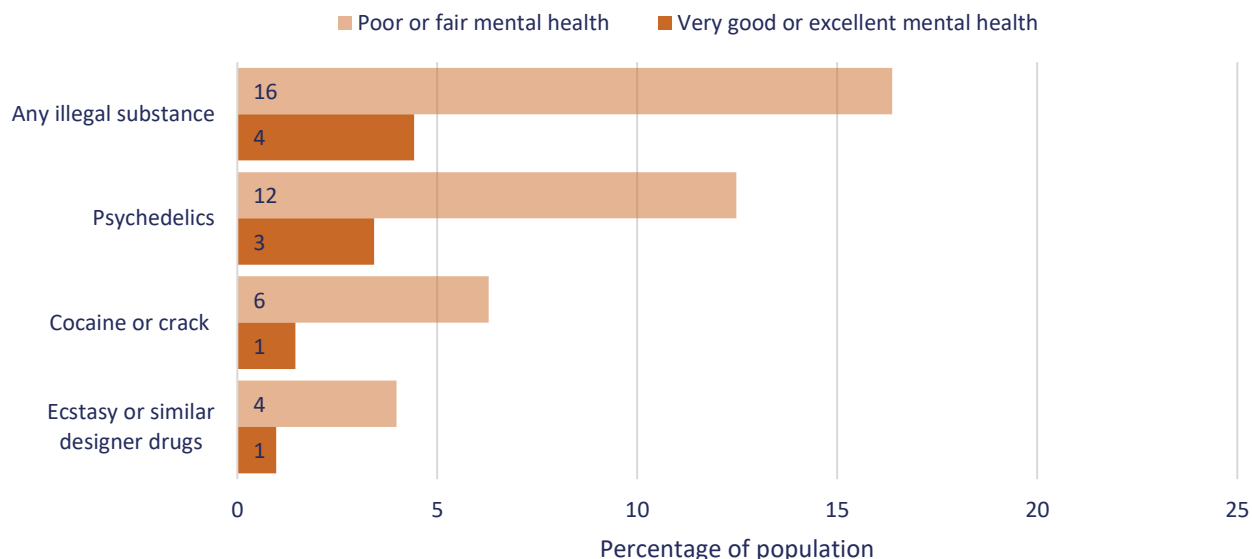
**2x**

Past 12 month prevalence of alcohol use did not vary by self-rated mental health (79%).

Excluding alcohol, legal substances were used by approximately twice as many people with poor or fair self-rated mental health than those with very good or excellent self-rated mental health



Figure 6 – Past 12 month illegal substance use in Canada, by self-rated mental health



4x

Those rating their mental health as poor or fair were 4 times more likely to have used any illegal substance in the past 12 months.

## Full results available online.



These summary results show only a small portion of the data collected in CSUS 2023. All indicators are available on an [online tool](#), which allows for disaggregation of indicators by many sociodemographic factors.

Also released alongside this report are Technical Notes, which detail changes in methodology. For the Technical Notes, 2023 questionnaire, and reports for previous iterations of CSUS, see the [Canadian Substance Use Survey page](#).

For more information about the survey and the results, please send an e-mail to [odss.bssd@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:odss.bssd@hc-sc.gc.ca).



## Recommended citation

Canadian Substance Use Survey – Summary of Results 2023. (2024) Government of Canada. Health Canada. Controlled Substances and Overdose Response Directorate, Office of Drug Research and Surveillance.