

Urban Indigenous Populations and Cannabis Use



GENERAL DATA (FROM THE SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE)

Cannabis use is widespread in Indigenous communities and is considered the **most widely consumed substance** (Wolfson et al., 2020).

A Statistics Canada survey (2019) showed that Indigenous youth **are more likely** than non-Indigenous youth to use cannabis, and to use it at an earlier age (Sikorski et al., 2019).

In this survey :



Indigenous boys
were

1,8 times more likely than
non-Indigenous boys
to use cannabis



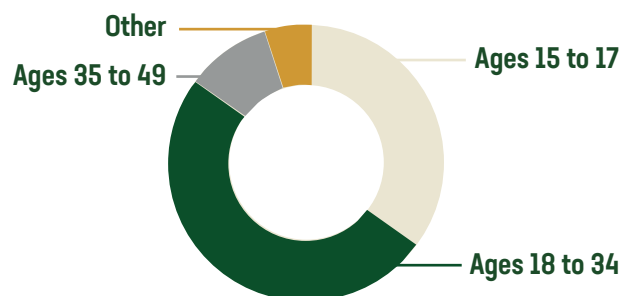
Indigenous girls
were

2,8 times more likely than
non-Indigenous girls
to use cannabis

Throughout the province, young people aged **15 to 17** and adults aged **18 to 34** are the largest consumers of cannabis (Lévesque et al., 2018).

More specifically, while young adults aged 18 to 34 are the heaviest users of drugs overall, **more than half** of 15- to 17-year-olds use cannabis (Lévesque et al., 2018).

Cannabis users



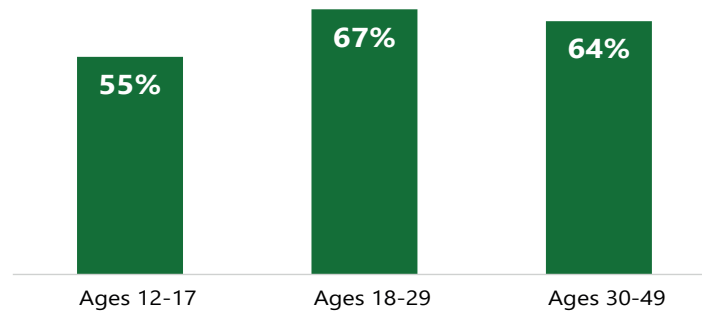
Across all age groups, **males are the main drug users**, and cannabis remains the preferred substance by far.

DATA SPECIFIC TO THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT (FROM THE PROVINCIAL CONSULTATION)

Cannabis use is often **normalized and trivialized** in Indigenous communities, a trend also observed in urban areas where the First Nations and Inuit population has been growing steadily for several years in Quebec, as in Canada.

Cannabis use affects **all ages**, from youth to older adults, without exception. Among urban Indigenous populations, cannabis use generally **begins earlier** and tends to be **more excessive** compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

ESTIMATED PERCENTAGE
OF CANNABIS USERS IN
FRIENDSHIP CENTRES
BY AGE GROUP



*Several Friendship Centres have identified a significant percentage of consumers over the age of 55. In some urban areas, close to 50% of people aged 55 and over use cannabis.



Many cannabis users also consume other substances, including alcohol, prescription or OTC medications, and other drugs (notably cocaine and methamphetamines).



Friendship Centre beneficiaries who use cannabis may also face various **difficulties and challenges**, such as poverty, intimate partner and family violence, homelessness / social disruption, cultural uprooting and exposure to a high-risk environment.

Some cannabis users recognize that they are **using too much** and would like to **use less**.

FACTORS RELATED TO CANNABIS USE AMONG URBAN INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

RISK FACTORS

- Easy access
- Normalization and trivialization of consumption
- Consumption by family, entourage and peers
- Experiences of violence (domestic, family, lateral, systemic) and discrimination
- Difficult socioeconomic conditions
- Lack of access to services and resources

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Through their comprehensive and diverse approach, Native Friendship Centres foster the overall wellness of urban Indigenous community members by addressing various protective factors.

In this light, the following elements can positively influence the lifestyle and choices of young Indigenous individuals:

- Pride in identity
- Cultural roots
- Intergenerational bonds
- Access to spaces for cultural expression
- Sense of belonging to a community within the urban setting
- Strengthening of social, familial and community ties
- Building trust with a supportive team that acts as a gateway to additional resources and assistance
- Access to nature, sports, arts, territory, outdoor activities
- Visibility and recognition of Indigenous people in urban spaces

The factors contributing to high drug consumption rates in Indigenous communities should be understood as a complex social phenomenon with multiple causes (Halseth & Cappe, 2023).

Some challenges related to health and wellness services in the Quebec network

- Inadequacy between the approaches used and the needs of Indigenous people
- Intervention approaches and services lack symbolic and cultural relevance for Indigenous and do not encourage family and community involvement
- Administrative processes are often complex
- Language barriers
- Long waiting for care and support
- Few organizations offering lodging
- Significant lack of post-treatment services
- Treatment duration often insufficient
- Lack of access to the Land (which is a relevant traditional healing method)
- Geographic remoteness makes access to services and treatment difficult, even unrealistic

PROMISING COURSES OF ACTION TO PREVENT ADDICTION AND LIMIT ITS NEGATIVE IMPACTS FROM AN URBAN ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVE

A safe environment

At a Native Friendship Centre, the communal living space offers a daily gathering place for all members. fosters the establishment of trust bonds with members, enhances the sense of community belonging and provides workers from the Centre with opportunities for informal interactions.

A bond of trust

The bonds of trust make it easy for Friendship Centre workers to identify people who use cannabis, since clients generally talk openly about their use. Through trust in workers and a sense of belonging to the Centre, individuals return to its activities and services. Consequently, through regular engagement, members cultivate close relationships with workers, fostering openness and enabling positive, secure intervention

Comprehensive intervention

Friendship Centres adopt a holistic approach, addressing various aspects of their members' lives. This approach creates safety nets that enhance the wellness of children and families. Centre staff not only provide support to individuals struggling with substance use but also extend assistance to their families and friends, empowering them to provide effective support.

Harm reduction approach

In general, Indigenous Friendship Centres view harm reduction approaches positively. Workers do not promote consumption, but when individuals have no intention to quit, their interventions aim to reduce risks.

Cultural dimension

The cultural aspect holds great promise for intervention in Indigenous contexts, playing a crucial role in preventing drug use and intervening with those who consume drugs. Pride in identity can serve as a protective factor among Indigenous youth. Native Friendship Centres provide spaces for members to engage in a healing process.

Impact approach

Impact approaches tend to work well with youth. While they may have some general knowledge about cannabis and drug use, they often lack a full understanding of the consequences. Additionally, having positive role models whom they can relate to is crucial.

SOME EXISTING INITIATIVES IN THE QUEBEC SERVICE NETWORK AND IN THE INDIGENOUS NETWORK FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING ADDICTIONS

INDIGENOUS NETWORK

- The Centre de readaptation Wapan (La Tuque)
- The Walgwan Center (Gesgapegiag)
- The Centre de readaptation Miam Uapukun (Sept-Îles)
- Mawiomi Treatment services Inc. (Gesgapegiag)
- Onen'tó:kon Healing Lodge (Montréal)
- Petapan (Val-d'Or)
- Projets autochtones du Québec - PAQ (Montréal)
- Wanaki Centre (Maniwaki)

QUEBEC SERVICE NETWORK

- Aire Ouverte (provincial)
- CACTUS (Montréal)
- Chabad Lifeline (Montréal)
- Domrémy Mauricie (Mauricie)
- Mixed squads of police and outreach workers (provincial)
- The CISSS/CIUSSS (provincial)
- Narcotics Anonymous (provincial)
- Portage (Québec city and Montréal)
- CHUM Telehealth Service (Montréal)

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- Songideye (collaborative project between the CISSS de l'Outaouais (CISSSO) and the Maniwaki Native Friendship Centre)
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ACTIONS, INITIATIVES AND PROJECTS SUPPORTED IN FRIENDSHIP CENTRES TO PREVENT AND INTERVENE WITH ADDICTION

Health and wellness clinics

Integrated within Native Friendship Centres, the health and wellness clinics provide culturally adapted access to healthcare and social services. The overarching goal of this collaboration is to reduce social disparities and address health and social issues affecting Indigenous communities. For drug users, these initiatives encourage openness. These clinics also offer treatments that address the geographical realities and unique hypermobility patterns of Indigenous populations.

Mobile clinic Mikinakw (CAAL)

The Centre d'amitié autochtone de Lanaudière (CAAL) developed a unique initiative in Quebec: the first mobile clinic by and for Indigenous people. The Mikinakw mobile clinic will help meet the intervention, education and holistic health needs of Lanaudière's Indigenous community. It will provide medical care to people living in isolation and outreach workers will create trustbased relationships to support people facing psychosocial issues like psychological distress.

Sharing circles - Wellness groups - Support groups

Most Native Friendship Centres have sharing circles that target different client groups and explore various themes, including psychoactive substance use and addictions. Sharing circles, where all participants are free to express themselves, are a common practice in Indigenous settings, fostering inclusivity, discussion, respect, and active listening.

Youth living environments or safe spaces

Native Friendship Centres have created and improved culturally safe spaces specifically for youth. It is important for a Native Friendship Centre to have a dedicated space for youth within their premises, designed in a way that reflects their identity so they can take ownership of it and feel proud of it. Furthermore, this space encourages the exploration of self and of cultural identity among youth, allowing them to strengthen their connection to their culture and community, as well as their pride in being Indigenous.

Willie's place (CAAVD)

Willie's Place is a respite centre with a high level of social acceptability for men and women in situations of homelessness, vulnerability and disconnection from society, family and community. The objective of Willie's Place is to strengthen the safety net for highly vulnerable persons through a culturally relevant and safe intervention approach as well as support for the steps that specifically meet their needs.

Neroski (CAALT)

The CAALT has established an alternative resource: a wilderness respite and healing facility catering to men facing legal issues, substance abuse, homelessness, violence or low self-esteem. The program centres around life in the wilderness, hunting, fishing, gathering medicinal plants, craftsmanship, sharing circles, traditional teachings and ceremonies. These endeavours aim not only at individual healing but also collective recovery.

Proximity intervention

Proximity intervention helps reach out to more people—especially those who may not actively seek help. The proximity approach aims to bridge the gap between people or families and services, or even better, to bring services directly to them.

Intervention through sports, outdoor activities and the arts

In collaboration with Collège d'Alma, a program encompassing approximately 250 hours on intervention through sports and outdoor activities in an Indigenous context has been co-constructed. Over the past two years, workers from several Friendship Centres have undergone this training and now utilize it as a tool for human development.

Cultural activities

Engaging in cultural activities often proves to be one of the most effective ways to connect with individuals who use substances, as they may not frequent the Centre regularly, and their initial contact may not be related to substance use.

Emergency hotlines

In recent years, several Native Friendship Centres have established emergency hotlines. For example, the CAAL developed an emergency service has been available at all times since the beginning of 2021. Individuals can call this phone line to speak with an outreach worker for urgent situations requiring immediate assistance.