

# Hey Pops, Pass the Joint: Boomers & Marijuana Use



By *Chuck Dinerstein, MD, MBA* — February 24, 2020

*Over the past several years, as marijuana has gone from illegal to recreational, its use among seniors has increased by 700%. We shouldn't be surprised. After all, those Boomer seniors use to be young when marijuana was less a gateway to hell -- and more a gateway to Woodstock Nation.*



Image courtesy of Ben Kerckx on Pixabay [1]

The increase was the most significant among women, individuals with a college education as well as incomes at the lower end, \$20K to 49K and upper end, greater than \$75K, as well as the married. Of course, with age comes disease, even among the Boomers. Among those with one or fewer chronic problems, the increase was 100%; those reporting mental health treatment saw a higher rise to 157%. And this will come as a surprise; those drinking alcohol increased their use of marijuana, another sociability kind of drug.

A deeper dive into the data on the Boomers with chronic disease seemed to suggest, no p values here to confuse and conflate, that heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension were not reasons not to indulge. All showed increases. Interestingly, cancer, for which a role for cannabis is being fashioned for treating nausea, diminished appetite, and pain, show the least increase; perhaps the standard formulary is sufficient to cover those needs.

The study has limitations; it is a survey and requires recall, an ability that declines with age,

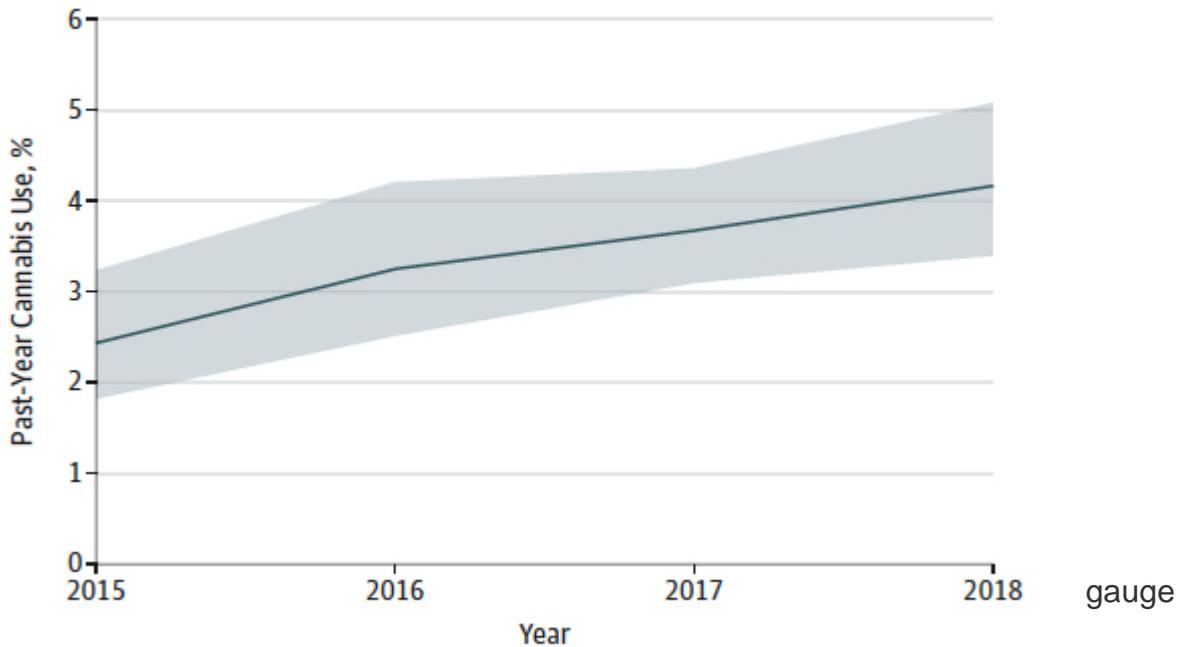
although the question was past use within the last few months. And recall is often influenced by a “social desirability” bias, saying what we believe to be appropriate rather than true. Of course, what is the socially correct response? Does it differ on the Coasts versus the Great Middle?

For the sharp-eyed, I failed to mention the initial numbers of seniors reporting their weed use, so

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**Figure. Trend in Prevalence of Past-Year Cannabis Use Among Adults 65 Years and Older in the United States, 2015 to 2018**

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The shading indicates 95% CIs.

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what that percentage change means. Despite all those very high percentages, the actual number of seniors toking up is quite low. Here is the graph. All told, we are speaking of 4% of Boomers. For the visually inclined, the chart, if the vertical axis rose to 100%, would demonstrate a very flat line. Is that why a picture is worth a thousand words?

Here are a few more factoids you can put in your pipe and smoke. Estimates of pot use in the total population are in the 40-55 million. Prior use is one of the best predictors of adults favoring legalization. And the boomers, like a plurality of individuals surveyed for a Marist [poll](#) [2], say that “marijuana’s greatest benefit is that it can help with some medical problems, [but] those who use it do so for many reasons.” Top on the list, stress reduction.

Source: Trends in Cannabis Use Among Older Adults in the United States, 2015-2018 JAMA DOI: 10.1001/jamainternmed.2019.7517

**Source URL:** <https://www.acsh.org/news/2020/02/24/hey-pops-pass-joint-boomers-marijuana-use-14592>

**Links**

[1] <https://pixabay.com/photos/man-portrait-old-man-cigar-beard-785528/>

[2] [http://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/misc/Yahoo%20News/20170417\\_Summary%20Yahoo%20News-Marist%20Poll\\_Weed%20and%20The%20American%20Family.pdf](http://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/misc/Yahoo%20News/20170417_Summary%20Yahoo%20News-Marist%20Poll_Weed%20and%20The%20American%20Family.pdf)