

# Community-Sponsored Cannabis Education for Older Vermonters: An Investigation of Community Needs and Available Resources

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# In the beginning...

There was a literature review.



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# What is the need?

**Research Question:** To what extent are community service providers educating older Vermonters (older than 65 years old) about cannabis use compared to other substances?

- Lit review showed that there are:
  - Risks associated with cannabis use
  - Gaps in cannabis use education
  - A lack of data surrounding cannabis use

# What We Did:

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- Started by working with United Way of Northwest Vermont to identify some community partners that they work with
- Also included some other community centers serving older Vermonters
- Conducted a survey

# The Survey

- What percentage of the community that you serve is age 65 or older?
- What types of services do you provide?
- What populations do you serve?
- Do you provide materials regarding the following substances?
- Do you provide materials regarding cannabis?
- What barriers does your organization face in discussing cannabis use with older adults?
- If resources were to be made available for you to distribute to your community, what would be your preferred format?

# Survey Administration

- Representatives from 58 eligible organizations were contacted
- 13 organizations completed the survey

# Results



# What we found:

- 0 organizations offered information on cannabis
- Sites that distributed resources related to other substances were largely focused on providing basic needs or community services
- 75% of sites that provided information on nicotine use were interested in providing information on cannabis if it were made available
- 100% of sites that provided information on alcohol and opioid use were interested in providing information on cannabis if it were made available
- Overall, 62% of organizations indicated that they were interested in providing information on cannabis if it were made available
- Every organization that was interested in distributing resources would prefer pamphlets as the educational material



# Conclusions

- There is a need
- There is a want
- There is an opportunity

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## Introduction

Cannabis use among older adults is increasing, driven in part by recreational use legalization in 2022 and evolving norms.<sup>1</sup> Despite its growing prevalence, cannabis education lags that of opioids, nicotine/tobacco, and alcohol.<sup>2</sup>

**Aim:** Considering the public health impact of substance-related resources, this study investigated how community service providers are informing older adults in Vermont about cannabis.

## Methods

Non-medical service organizations in Chittenden County were identified in partnership with United Way of Northwest Vermont. Representatives from 58 eligible organizations were contacted via phone and email. Eligibility was determined by confirmation of service to adults (age  $\geq 65$ ) in Vermont. Descriptive categorical data from a seven-question, multiple-selection survey were summarized by percentage frequency.

## Results



# 13

organizations completed the survey, with all serving urban populations of adults (>65)

46% primarily served older adults (>50%); Substance-related resources were largely distributed by organizations providing **basic needs** (50%) and/or **community services** (60%)



# 0

organizations offered education on cannabis

All sites with **opioid or alcohol** resources and most (75%) with **nicotine/tobacco** resources expressed interest



**Pamphlets** were the preferred format among organizations interested in education

62% of organizations expressed interest in **distributing educational materials on cannabis**



## Discussion

- Community-sponsored education of cannabis is lacking compared to alcohol, opioids and nicotine
- There is significant interest in providing pamphlets on cannabis, particularly in community centers already doing substance education
- Stigma and preference for external referrals for cannabis-related issues were cited as the primary barriers to education among organizations denying interest in cannabis education

## Conclusion

Organizations serving older Vermonters lack educational resources on cannabis. However, most organizations engaged in substance education expressed an interest in incorporating information on cannabis. As such, targeted distribution of cannabis-related educational materials is a feasible public health solution that may improve health outcomes among older adults.

## References

1. Vermont Department of Health. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). 2022. Accessed September 22, 2024.
2. Wolfe D, Corace K, Butler C, et al. Impacts of medical and non-medical cannabis on the health of older adults: Findings from a scoping review of the literature. PLoS One. 2023;18(2):e0281826.



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