

Our Health Counts Thunder Bay

An inclusive community-driven health survey for Indigenous peoples of Thunder Bay

Substance Use

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) details the goals and impacts of Canada's Indigenous policies over time. These included the elimination of traditional Indigenous governments and livelihood, disruption of our families and communities, and the planned expiry of treaty, half-breed script, and Inuit land claim obligations through processes of assimilation. While attempts at assimilation have been unsuccessful, these policies have resulted in a disproportionate burden of poverty, dislocation from traditional lands, disruption of family and community support systems, the undermining of language and culture, and restricted access to traditional medicines and healing practices for many Indigenous people. These conditions and experiences have been linked to today's high rates of commercial or non-traditional tobacco use and substance use.^{1,2} Commercial tobacco reduction strategies have been effective in reducing tobacco use among the general population,³ however, Indigenous communities have not experienced the same benefits. The findings on alcohol use align with existing evidence that Indigenous people in Canada frequently abstain from drinking alcohol, but among those who do drink, heavy drinking is common.

Cigarettes

73% of Indigenous adults in Thunder Bay smoke compared to **23%** of adults (aged 12 years+) in Thunder Bay.⁴



vs.

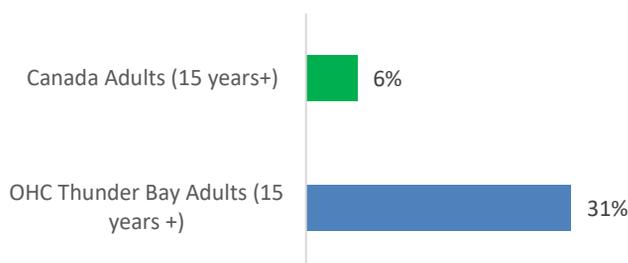


**3 times
the rate**

41% of smokers currently smoke 11 or more cigarettes per day.

Over Half (57%) of smokers tried to quit at least once in the past year. Nationally, **52%** of daily smokers attempted to quit in the past year.⁵

Living in a Smoking Home



Alcohol

1 in 2 (49%)

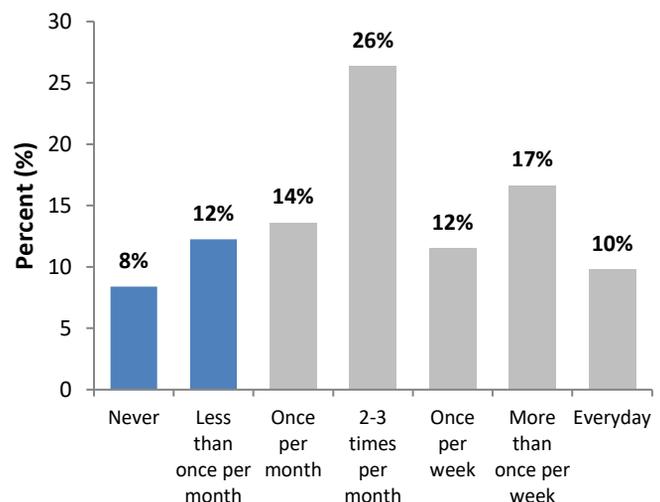
Indigenous adults in Thunder Bay did not drink any alcoholic beverages in the past month.

38% of Ontarians did not drink any alcoholic beverages in the past month.⁶

20%

of Indigenous adults abstain or rarely engaged (less than once per month) in heavy drinking (5 or more drinks at a sitting for self-identified men and 4 or more for self-identified women, trans or others).

How common is heavy drinking



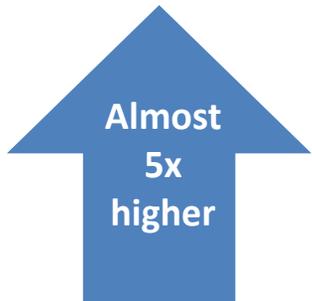
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Substance Use

Cannabis use is a common method of self-medication among populations with unmet health care needs.⁷ Cannabis has also become a more accepted treatment for certain health conditions or side effects of health treatments. Since the recent legalization of cannabis, it is important to understand its use within different populations in Canada. The growing opioid crisis among Indigenous peoples in Canada has also demonstrated a need for data on non-prescription opioid use and related harms to better address the needs of those at risk of overdose and to improve public health.

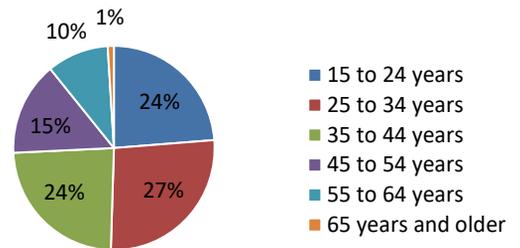
Cannabis Use



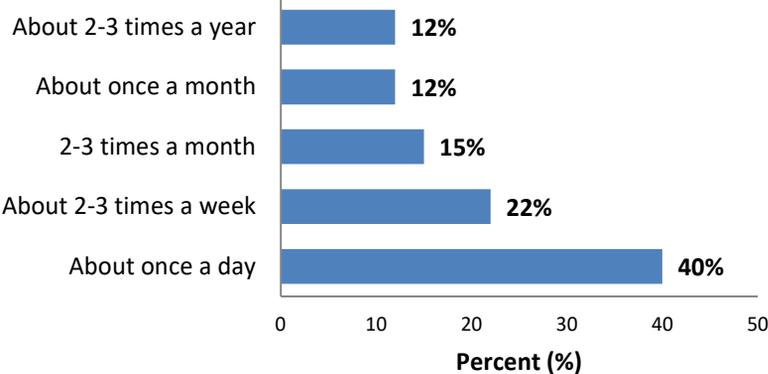
58% of Indigenous adults in Thunder Bay used cannabis in the past year.

12% of Ontarian adults used cannabis in the past year.⁸

Age of Cannabis Users



Frequency of Cannabis Use in Past Year among Cannabis Users



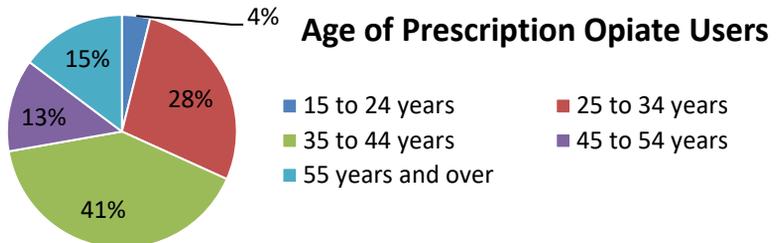
Of those Indigenous adults in Thunder Bay who used cannabis in the past year:

- **30%** rated their general health as fair or poor
- **79%** had at least 1 chronic health condition
- **40%** screened positive for PTSD

These rates were similar to non-cannabis users indicating a need for more research on the drivers of cannabis use.

Opioid Use

12% of Indigenous adults in Thunder Bay used prescription opiates without a prescription or out of keeping with how they were prescribed in the past year.



Age of Prescription Opiate Users

Of those who used prescription opiates without a prescription/out of keeping with how they were prescribed,

42% used them about once a day.

76% of those who used prescription opiates without a prescription/out of keeping with their prescription (in the past year) have at least one chronic health condition.

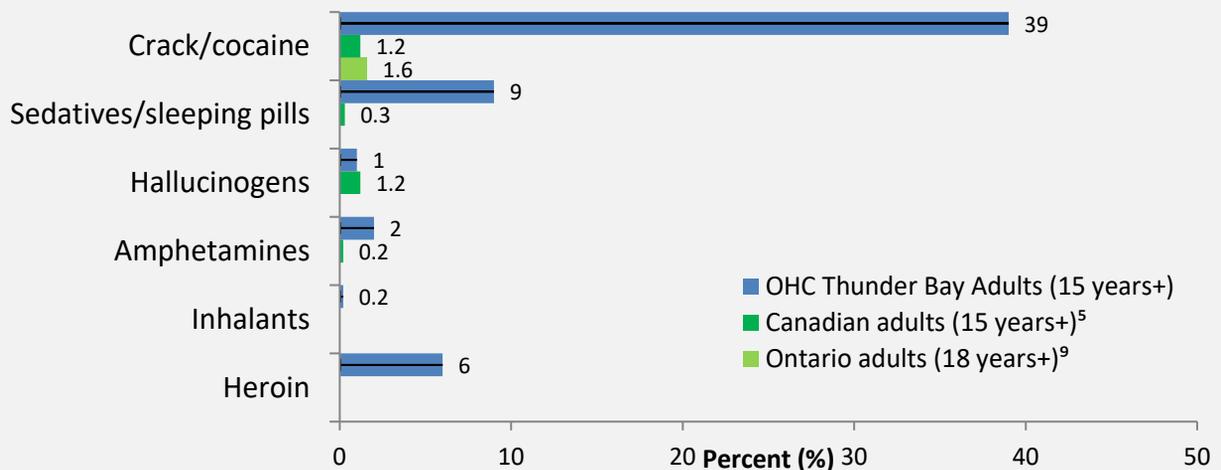
These rates were similar to non-opiate users indicating that more research is needed to understand links between chronic illness and opiate use.

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Substance Use

Other Substance Use in the Past 12 Months



35% of Indigenous adults in Thunder Bay have used a needle to inject a drug that wasn't prescribed to them in their lifetime.

10% of Indigenous adults in Thunder Bay have ever shared needles with someone else.

Policy Implications

TRC Call to Action 19: We call upon the federal government, in consultation with Indigenous Peoples, to establish measurable goals to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Such efforts would focus on indicators such as additions and the availability of appropriate health services.

TRC Call to Action 21: We call upon the federal government to provide sustainable funding for existing and new Indigenous healing centres to address physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harms.

MMIWG Report Calls to Justice 3.4: We call upon all governments to ensure that all Indigenous communities receive immediate and necessary resources, including funding and support, for the establishment of sustainable, permanent, no-barrier, preventative, accessible, holistic, wraparound services, including mobile trauma and addictions recovery teams.

MMIWG Report Calls to Justice 3.5: We call upon all governments to establish culturally competent and responsive crisis response teams in all communities and regions, to meet the immediate needs of an Indigenous person, family, and/or community after a traumatic event (murder, accident, violent event, etc.), alongside ongoing support.

Additional Recommendations: City of Thunder Bay, provincial and federal policy makers work in partnership with urban Indigenous Peoples and organizations to:

- Develop, fund, implement and evaluate community driven commercial (nontraditional) tobacco reduction programs and services in alignment with Canada's commitment under the Framework Convention of Tobacco Control.
- Develop, fund, and implement Indigenous specific and community driven cannabis use health information resources and use reduction programming.
- Develop, fund, and implement Indigenous specific and community initiatives that address the causes of and provide treatment for (including harm reduction) opioid misuse.

Definitions Indigenous adults: persons self-identifying as Indigenous such as First Nations, Métis, Inuit, or other Nation in Canada, aged 15 years and older living or using services in the City of Thunder Bay.*The 2015/2016 CCHS defines heavy drinking as 5 or more drinks in one sitting for males, or 4 or more drinks in one sitting for females.

Sources 1. Mikkonen & Raphael (2010); 2. Truth and Reconciliation Canada (2015); 3. Reid et al. (2017); 4. Statistics Canada (2016); 5. Statistics Canada (2015); 6. Statistics Canada (2012a); 7. Harris & Edlund (2005); 8. Statistics Canada (2012b); 9. Ialomiteanu et al. (2016)

Citation Brar, R., Shields, T., Muir, N. M., McConkey, S., Martin, E., Bean, J., Gomez, C. Hardy, M., & Smylie, J. (2020). Our Health Counts Thunder Bay: Substance use [Fact sheet].

Population based estimates were created using respondent driven sampling (see Project Overview and Methods Factsheet)

Our Health Counts: Community health assessment by the people, for the people



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Our Health Counts Thunder Bay

Substance Use Reference

Our Health Counts Thunder Bay is an inclusive community-based health survey for Indigenous peoples of Thunder Bay and is part of the largest Indigenous population health study in Canada.

Participants were selected using respondent-driven sampling, a statistical method which uses social networks in the community to recruit Indigenous people living in the city.

Survey Question	RDS Prevalence Estimate (95% Confidence Interval)
At the present time, do you smoke cigarettes?	
Yes	72.70% (66.50, 78.90)
No	27.20% (21.00, 33.40)
If yes, on average, how many cigarettes do you smoke each day?	
Less than 11	59.10% (51.90, 66.30)
11 or more	40.80% (33.60, 48.00)
If yes, on average, in the past 12 months how many times have you tried to quit smoking?	
Never	42.90% (34.60, 51.30)
At least once	56.90% (48.60, 65.30)
Do you have a smoke free home?	
Yes, completely smoke free	14.80% (9.60, 20.10)
Yes, there are smokers living in the home, but they smoke outside only	53.50% (46.70, 60.20)
No	31.70% (25.70, 37.60)
Have you used an e-cigarette or vaping device in the last 12 months?	
Yes	23.60% (18.20, 29.10%)
No	
During the past 12 months, how often have you had 4 or more drinks on one occasion? (Self-identify women, trans or other only)	
Never	10.50% (4.20, 16.90)
Less than once per month	8.70% (0.30, 17.10)
Once per month	8.80% (1.10, 16.50)
2 to 3 times per month	26.50% (15.50, 37.50)
Once per week	18.70% (9.30, 28.20)
More than once per week	17.00% (9.20, 24.70)
Everyday	9.80% (2.70, 16.90)
During the past 12 months, how often have you had 5 or more drinks on one occasion? (Self-identify male only)	
Never	6.30% (0.00, 12.80)
Less than once per month	15.80% (8.80, 22.90)
Once per month	18.40% (7.60, 29.10)
2 to 3 times per month	29.20% (18.60, 39.80)
Once per week	4.30% (0.10, 8.60)
More than once per week	16.30% (6.30, 26.10)
Everyday	9.70% (3.70, 15.70)



WELL LIVING HOUSE



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Substance Use Reference

Survey Question	RDS Prevalence Estimate (95% Confidence Interval)
In the past 12 months, have you used Cannabis/Marijuana?	
Yes	58.10% (51.40, 64.90)
No	31.80% (35.10, 48.50)
How often did you use Cannabis in the past 12 months?	
About 2 to 3 times a year	11.80% (5.60, 18.00)
About once a month	11.50% (5.60, 17.50)
2 to 3 times a month	15.10% (9.00, 21.20)
About 2 to 3 times a week	21.70% (15.20, 28.20)
About once a day	39.90% (31.30, 48.50)
Cannabis users in the past year by age	
15 to 24 years	24.30% (16.40, 32.30)
25 to 34 years	26.50% (19.30, 33.70)
35 to 44 years	23.80% (16.30, 31.20)
45 to 54 years	14.70% (8.40, 20.90)
55 to 64 years	9.80% (4.70, 14.90)
65 years and older	0.90% (0.00, 3.00)
Cannabis users in the past year by self-rated general health status	
Fair/Poor	30.20% (22.10, 38.30)
Good/Very good/Excellent	69.80% (61.70, 77.90)
Cannabis users in the past year by chronic conditions	
No chronic condition(s)	20.70% (13.60, 27.90)
At least one chronic condition	79.30% (72.10, 86.40)
Cannabis users in the past year by PTSD screening result	
3 to 4 PTSD symptoms (Screened positive for PTSD)	40.40% (32.00, 48.90)
1 or 2 PTSD symptoms	24.40% (16.50, 32.40)
No PTSD symptoms (Screened negative for PTSD)	35.10% (26.80, 43.50)
In the past 12 months, have you used heroin?	
Yes	6.00% (3.10, 8.90)
No	93.40% (90.50, 96.40)
How often did you use heroin in the past 12 months?	
About 2 to 3 times a year	27.80% (13.10, 42.50)
About once a month	0.10% (0.00, 0.50)
2 to 3 times a month	19.10% (1.60, 36.50)
About 2 to 3 times a week	10.10% (0.00, 25.00)
About once a day	43.00% (20.10, 65.80)
In the past 12 months, have you used prescription opiates?	
Yes	11.85% (8.00, 15.70)
No	87.90% (84.00, 91.80)



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Survey Question	RDS Prevalence Estimate (95% Confidence Interval)
How often did you use prescription opiates in the past 12 months?	
About 2 to 3 times a year	7.60% (0.00, 16.40%)
About once a month	13.00% (2.10, 24.00)
2 to 3 times a month	18.70% (5.70, 31.60)
About 2 to 3 times a week	18.10% (3.00, 33.30)
About once a day	41.60% (25.20, 58.00)
Prescription opiate users in the past year by age	
15 to 24 years	3.60% (0.00, 9.40)
25 to 34 years	27.80% (12.10, 43.50)
35 to 44 years	40.50% (23.10, 57.90)
45 to 54 years	13.00% (5.90, 20.00)
55 to 64 years	15.20% (4.40, 26.00)
Prescription opiate users in the past year by self-rated general health status	
Fair/Poor	33.00% (17.10, 48.80)
Good/Very good/Excellent	67.10% (51.20, 82.80)
Prescription opiate users in the past year by chronic conditions	
No chronic condition(s)	24.20% (7.60, 40.90)
At least one chronic condition	75.80% (59.10, 92.40)
Prescription opiate users in the past year by PTSD screening result	
3 to 4 PTSD symptoms (Screened positive for PTSD)	37.20% (21.80, 52.60)
1 or 2 PTSD symptoms	28.40% (11.90, 44.90)
No PTSD symptoms (Screened negative for PTSD)	34.40% (17.40, 51.30)
In the past 12 months, have you used the following substances...	
Crack/cocaine	38.60% (32.20, 45.00)
Sedatives or sleeping pills	8.60% (5.80, 11.30)
Hallucinogens	1.20% (0.10, 2.20)
Amphetamines	1.60% (1.30, 3.10)
Inhalants/Solvents	0.20% (0.00, 0.60)
In the past 12 months, have you sought treatment for substance abuse/addiction?	
Yes	27.50% (21.40, 33.50)
No	72.60% (66.50, 78.60)
Have you ever used a needle to inject any drug that wasn't prescribed to you?	
Yes	34.60% (28.50, 40.80)
No	65.40% (59.20, 71.60)



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Survey Question	RDS Prevalence Estimate (95% Confidence Interval)
Have you ever shared needles with anyone including your spouse, partner, or close friend?	
Yes	9.90% (6.60, 13.10)
No	89.80% (86.50, 93.10)
Do you know where to access needle exchange program/get safe needles in Thunder Bay?	
Yes	71.90% (63.90, 79.90)
No	26.80% (19.00, 34.60)
Would you use a service like overdose prevention sites (OPS), supervised injection sites (SIS), supervised consumption services?	
Yes	64.50% (55.00, 74.00)
No	33.70% (24.10, 43.20)

