

Harmful impacts of cannabis use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people needs greater focus

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The Alcohol and Other Drugs Knowledge Centre has published a *Review of cannabis use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*. Authors of the review note that the health effects of cannabis use may not always be seen as a high priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, yet the impact of cannabis use on physical and mental health can have significant consequences. The use of high potency cannabis has increased over the last two decades, with a corresponding increased risk to health. In particular, young people and those who started using cannabis whilst young are at increased risk of experiencing harms to mental health. The increase in harms has been matched by a reduction in the perception that cannabis use is harmful. The use of cannabis with other drugs, especially tobacco is also concerning and should be an important item on the Aboriginal health agenda.

This latest review says that physical harms to health include effects on the respiratory system, cardiovascular system, an increased risk of cancer, and in-utero effects from maternal use. Harms to mental health include an increased risk of psychotic episodes, depression, anxiety and problems with memory and paying attention. While generalising findings about cannabis use for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is problematic due to limited data, high rates of cannabis use have been identified and are a cause for concern. The review highlights protective factors that reduce harms from cannabis use and suggests future directions for collaborative culturally secure approaches in addressing cannabis related harms in communities.

Lead author Julia Butt said “There is a clear need for the development of community lead culturally safe prevention and treatment resources that can address cannabis related harms. A range of promising opportunities exist; including school-based prevention, health promotion resources, and increasing the capacity of mental health and alcohol and other drug services to better meet the needs of cannabis related presentations. These opportunities can be maximised if the best practice principles of focusing on social and emotional wellbeing, cultural safety, self-determination and adequate resourcing are adhered to, alongside broader approaches to improving the social determinants of health”.

HealthInfoNet Director, Neil Drew says, “The review is part of a suite of knowledge exchange products that includes an [infographic summary](#) of the review, a [video](#), and a [key factsheet](#) ensuring the information reaches a time poor workforce in multiple ways”.

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More information: The Knowledge Centre provides online access to a comprehensive collection of relevant, evidence-based, current and culturally appropriate alcohol and other drug knowledge-support and decision-support materials and information that can be used in the prevention, identification and management of alcohol and other drug use in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. The work of the Knowledge Centre is supported by a collaborative partnership with the three national alcohol and other drug research www.aodknowledgecentre.net.au

