Sensible Cannabis Education: Supporting Youth Cannabis Literacy

JENNA VALLERIANI, PHD
STRATEGIC ADVISOR, CANADIAN STUDENTS FOR SENSIBLE DRUG POLICY (CSSDP)
POST-DOCTORAL FELLOW AT THE BC CENTRE ON SUBSTANCE USE (BCCSU)
DECLARATION

Personal
◦ Written for cannabis publications (for pay) and spoken at cannabis events (travel honorarium only)

Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy (CSSDP)
◦ Unrestricted grant from Canopy Growth Corp. in 2017
◦ Lunch provided by industry for one ‘Cannabis on Campus’ event in BC in 2018
OBJECTIVES

• Discuss access to evidence based information as critical for young people’s health, decision making and well being

• Consider pragmatic youth education which is inclusive of both prevention and harm reduction in order to maximize effectiveness and protect all youth

• Discuss a youth-centered approach to cannabis education, and why these should be prioritized

• Consider how this information applies to other “cannabis conversations”
CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUTH

• Canadian Cannabis Survey 2017: past 12-month use reported as high as 41% for adolescents 16 to 19 years old and 45% for young adults aged 20 to 24

• New opportunity: In light of relatively high use rates among youth, we need education within a legalized context which serves youth who don’t use cannabis – but also youth who are already using cannabis

• ....But “youth” encompasses a diverse set of young people, and there’s no silver bullet approach to talking to youth about cannabis
1. “Youth Speak: Cannabis Legalization in the 21st Century”

“Young people shouldn’t be worst off under legalization than they are under prohibition.”

- Participant at Youth Speak
SOME OF THE ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY YOUTH

• Mostly rooted (covert) abstinence or stigma based programming
• Doesn’t speak specifically about cannabis
• Exaggeration of risk, doesn’t resonate with young people’s experiences
• Ignores anything other than “abstinence” & “problematic”
• Lacks harm reduction
• Limited sessions or time devoted to curriculum in schools
• Delivery misses the mark
• Parents often left in the dark
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT CONT’D

2. Cannabis on Campus Events

3. Sensible Cannabis Education: A Toolkit for Educating Youth

*Photos from UBCO’s CSSDP Chapter; “Cannabis on Campus” Event
TEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Education grounded in evidence-based information rather than fear
2. Open dialogue that is non-judgmental and use interactive approaches
3. Meaningful inclusion
4. Delivery by a trained facilitator or peer
5. Starting earlier with age-appropriate content
6. Supporting parents to have age appropriate and open conversations
7. The inclusion of harm reduction
8. Education tailored to the specific context
9. Ongoing education available to youth
10. Attention to overlapping issues of racism, social justice, and stigma
GROUNDED IN EVIDENCE BASED INFORMATION

• Fear-based, authoritarian, exaggerated and abstinence-based approaches do not resonate with youth\(^2\)

• Environmental factors can increase or decrease the likelihood of use and should be accounted for in approaches to education\(^3\)

• Go beyond just facts: include additional approaches such as skills-development in drug education\(^4\)
• Youth don’t have many opportunities to have balanced discussions about cannabis, which can shed light on how youth experience their choices related to cannabis use.\(^5\)

• Listening and asking open-ended questions without judgment is important to building rapport and fostering open dialogue about cannabis.

• Studies that have assessed the use of innovative resources, such as films, to encourage these conversations have shown promising results.\(^6,7\)

• Education efforts around cannabis should prioritize interactive approaches that provide contact and communication opportunities for the exchange of ideas among participants.\(^6,7\)
MEANINGFUL INCLUSION

• Young people have a right to be included in the development to ensure education is relevant and reflective of their experiences, and more generally, to be involved in conversations that value their experience.

• Tokenism vs. meaningful participation

• Consulting with youth is critical to successful and has been associated with improved efficacy of drug prevention program\textsuperscript{6,7}
SUPPORT PARENTS TO HAVE OPEN AND INFORMED CONVERSATIONS

• Families also need support to initiate and encourage ongoing conversations around cannabis.

• Parents are often left out of educational efforts for drug education, but can be a key component to ensuring consistent messaging around cannabis, particularly in a legalized context.

• Supporting parents’ access to information is an essential, but often overlooked piece.

For parents and guardians, this means discussions around cannabis use should be ongoing, open, and non-judgmental.
Harm reduction strategies also address the needs of young people who may already be using cannabis.

Most effective with older youth (senior high school and above) and heavy youth cannabis users.

Teaching harm reduction strategies doesn’t encourage youth to use cannabis, and is an effective approach in a range of contexts.

Brief Interventions - short and easy to administer interventions; can be delivered in medical (e.g., GP’S offices) or more general, non-medical settings.
APPLICATION TO HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

• Consider that over exaggeration of harms or moral judgement can be counter-productive and can prevent youth from being honest about their use – efforts to delay early onset and prevention are not mutually exclusive from open, honest dialogue

• Although youth may be using cannabis for the euphoric effects, they also may use cannabis for self-medication, such stress, anxiety, depression or for sleep problems

• Brief interventions can be a helpful tool & can be ongoing - providing information about cannabis related risks, advice to cut down/change risky behaviours, discuss use patterns

• Value of having resources on hand and/or knowledge of resources and being able to direct parents, youth
WHERE TO START?

• “Cannabis Use and Youth: A Parent’s Guide” HereToHelp BC

• “Abstinence Plus”: focus on comprehensive education, acknowledges the persistence of cannabis use combined with its changing legal status, and underscores health and safety

• “Using Evidence to Talk About Cannabis” – International Centre for Science in Drug Policy: quick, easy, and evidence-based responses to commonly heard claims on cannabis use and regulation

• Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines - CRISM

• “CYCLES” – CISUR: film-based resource that encourages teens to talk openly and honestly about why some young people use cannabis

• Sensible Cannabis Education: A Toolkit for Educating Youth - CSSDP
Legal regulation of cannabis offers an opportunity for more pragmatic “cannabis conversations”—the same old approach repackaged will likely miss the mark.

Access to evidence based drug education is critical for young people, their health literacy and well-being.

Approaches that meaningfully include youth voices and experiences should be prioritized—ensure education resonates with current youth experiences as both users and non-users.

Drug education and cannabis conversations should be inclusive of both prevention and harm reduction in order to maximize effectiveness and protect all youth.
• CSSDP Board of Directors and Chapter Members
• Hilary Black, Director of Patient Education and Advocacy, Canopy Growth
• Toolkit Youth Content Team
  o Florence Chan
  o Kira London-Nadeau
  o Max Monahan-Ellison
• Toolkit Co-authors
  o Nazlee Maghsoudi
  o Marlena Nguyen-Dang
  o Stephanie Lake
  o Michelle Thiessen
  o Jill Robinson

• Toolkit Reviewers
  o Dr. Dan Werb, Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation
  o Dr. Rebecca Haines-Saah, University of Calgary
  o Anna McKiernan and Kate Fleming, Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Abuse
  o Patricia Scott-Jeoffroy, Educational Consultant, Parent Action on Drugs
  o Cathy Maser, Nurse Practitioner, The Hospital for Sick Children.
  o Jane McCarthy, Parent Action on Drugs
  o Joanne Brown, Parent Action on Drugs
  o Alexzander Samuelsson
THANK YOU

Jenna Valleriani
jvalleriani@cfenet.ubc.ca
www.cssdp.org/youthtoolkit