



Cannabis Communication Guide Impact Story

Project Goal and Target Audience

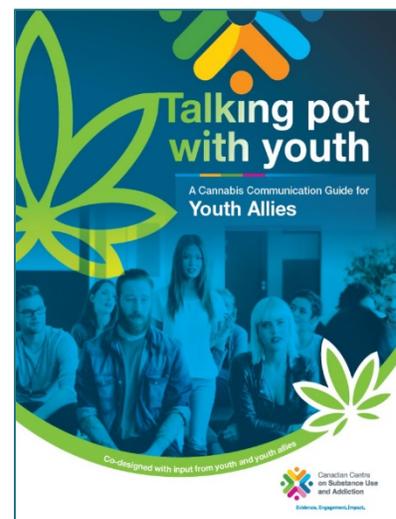
Before the legalization of non-medical cannabis, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) conducted research that found that young Canadians are often misinformed about the potential risks and benefits of cannabis use. These misperceptions highlighted the need for public education initiatives about safer cannabis use.

Canadian youth ages 14–24 need knowledge about the effects of cannabis on the brain and body, and have difficulty finding credible, evidence-based information to answer their questions about cannabis. Young Canadians reported a lack of open and honest conversations about cannabis use with trusted adults and allies in their lives, including teachers, coaches, counsellors and parents.

As one of CCSA's 2018–2019 key initiatives, we developed with youth and youth allies *Talking Pot with Youth: A Cannabis Communication Guide for Youth Allies*. This process-based resource supports unbiased, non-judgmental conversations about cannabis use between youth and youth allies. The tool aims to build capacity among youth allies to effectively communicate the risks and benefits of cannabis use. By doing so, they can empower young Canadians to make evidence-informed choices about cannabis use.

The *Cannabis Communications Guide* was developed through co-design workshops with youth, youth allies and practitioners. It is a practical resource to support youth allies in communicating openly and honestly about cannabis use with youth. CCSA achieved widespread national uptake of the resource by disseminating it through our own and our partners' networks, giving presentations and workshops to youth allies, and promoting it on social media.

Our target audience is youth allies who have an opportunity to talk to young people about cannabis.



How We Measure Success: The Method

CCSA developed a social media campaign to promote and measure uptake of the *Cannabis Communication Guide*. After the campaign, CCSA circulated in January 2020 an online questionnaire to stakeholders who had received the guide to find out if it had helped, directly or indirectly, to ease conversations about cannabis use between youth and youth allies. The questionnaire asked respondents if and how they had used the guide, whether it helped facilitate their conversations with youth, and whether it helped improve their relationships with youth. For intermediary stakeholders working in the public health sector, we asked whether the guide helped them in training staff and building capacity. Youth allies and public health professionals can influence the perception of cannabis by young people, and we wanted to ensure the impact of the guide on their activities was captured.



CCSA identified a number of stakeholders willing to participate in key informant interviews to share their experiences in using the *Cannabis Communication Guide* and provide feedback on ways CCSA could improve it and resources like it. Expanding on questions from the online questionnaire, these interviews enabled CCSA to better understand how the guide has supported conversations about cannabis use, as well as to identify champions who could be instrumental in promoting it. Interviewees were also asked to express any challenges they had experienced while using the guide and any suggestions for how CCSA could address them.

Making Sense of Result Data: The Impact

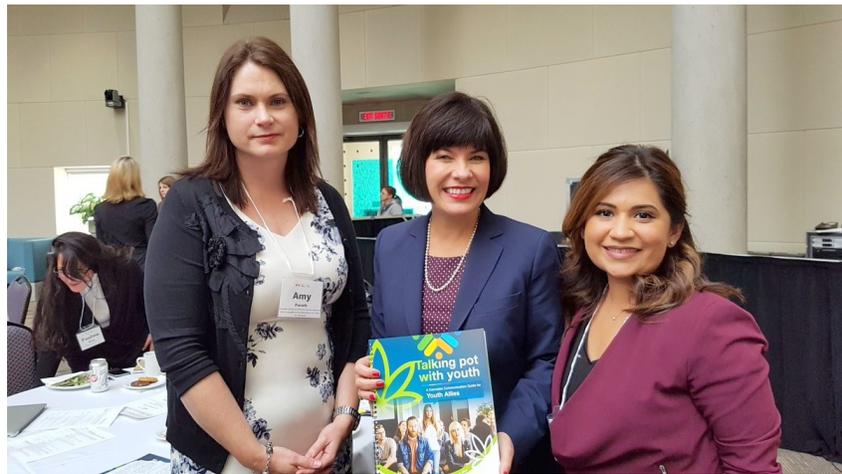
Since its launch, the *Cannabis Communication Guide* has been downloaded almost 31,400 times. Social media statistics also indicate successful uptake of the guide with 1.1 million impressions, 42,000 engagements and 2,035 link clicks.

Our questionnaire also provided positive data. The stakeholders who responded came from nine provinces and four sectors: health, social services, education and enforcement. Among all respondents, 63% indicated they used the guide as a sole resource in their practice. 43% of respondents used the guide directly in talking with youth about cannabis, while 70% used it indirectly when training youth allies such as teachers or counsellors. Between the two groups, there is an overlap of 27% who used the guide both directly and indirectly.

When asked about the *Cannabis Communication Guide*, specific comments from respondents indicated that it provided helpful tips for non-judgmental approaches, which increased trust and relationships with youth. Almost all respondents (97%) would recommend the guide to others.

What Our Partners Say: The Stories

CCSA conducted four key informant interviews with enthusiastic champions representing youth councillors and policy and health promotion professionals who wanted to further share their success with the guide. Our first champion has 14 years experience working mainly as a supervisor in youth substance use services, but sometimes as a counsellor at community events. She found that while most professionals have their own approaches to speaking with youth, she was encouraged that the principles outlined in the guide align well with their approach to public health and health promotion. The guide not only validates counsellors' technical principles, but also lends credibility to their approach among parents and others who may lack experience and confidence in having these kinds of conversations. She felt the tool has allowed for parents and other youth allies to improve communication with young people. With user-friendly features and easy to understand principles, she said the guide had positive impacts on youth and had effectively trained youth allies to be unbiased facilitators rather than lecturers.



Former Health Minister Ginette Petitpas-Taylor (middle) at the launch of the Cannabis Communication Guide, with CCSA's Dr. Amy Porath and Kiran Somjee



Sharing similar perspectives, our second champion has spent over 48 years working with teenagers and 25 years working in the field of addiction. A certified addictions counsellor, he said that the values inherent in the guide, such as those encouraging non-judgmental thinking and open and honest dialogue between youth and youth allies, can improve relationships with youth. He suggested that in future updates, the guide would benefit from defining different patterns of use and providing harm reduction messages tailored to where someone falls on the spectrum of use. He also emphasized the importance of delaying cannabis use as long as possible and would like to see discussions continue about delaying cannabis use into adulthood. He has promoted the guide to teachers and parents, who he thinks can benefit from cannabis-related materials to support their conversations with youth.

Our last two champions hold similar positions in policy and health promotion. They work with a broad spectrum of stakeholder groups, from teachers to social workers to Indigenous partners. Both champions emphasized the credibility of the guide and have made efforts to promote it to their clients. They said it provides realistic tools and helps to check biases and to engage youth in open and safe conversations. Both stressed how important it is for youth allies to understand how their personal beliefs and experiences can affect how they talk to youth about cannabis. One of the two also thought that coaches and teachers are not being trained in having conversations about cannabis, so the guide could be a necessary resource to fill the knowledge gap.

Our stakeholders not only used CCSA's *Talking Pot with Youth: A Cannabis Communication Guide for Youth Allies* to facilitate conversations with youth about cannabis, but also helped increase public access to it. CCSA is happy to see users of the guide improve their relationship with youth, build trust and coach youth about cannabis use. Such improvements in communications are critical to the overall well-being of youth, as well as to helping them avoid problematic substance use. Our guide is seen as a trusted, evidence-based resource for their practice by many youth allies and is used as a training resource. It provides a common language for youth allies and a common standard for best practices.

