

PWGSC Contract: OD160-18-2537/001/CY

POR Registration: 019-17

Contract Award Date: August 25, 2017

Delivery date: November 28, 2017

**EKOS Research Associates Inc.**

# Public Opinion Research on Drug Impaired Driving

*Baseline Survey Findings Report*

Prepared for:

**Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada**

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français

For more information on this report, please email:

[ps.communications-communications.sp@canada.ca](mailto:ps.communications-communications.sp@canada.ca)

## EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

**Contact:** Susan Galley

**Ottawa Office**

359 Kent Street, Suite 300

Ottawa, Ontario

K2P 0R6

Tel: (613) 235 7215

Fax: (613) 235 8498

E-mail: [pobox@ekos.com](mailto:pobox@ekos.com)

[www.ekos.com](http://www.ekos.com)

# SUMMARY

Public Safety Canada is developing a national marketing and advertising campaign designed to increase public awareness of the dangers and risks associated with drug-impaired driving, even as its legal status changes. The purpose of the research is to learn more about public awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to the dangers and risks of drug-impaired driving. This information will inform the development and planning of the national campaign, support final decisions around the implementation of messages and creative for the advertising, and evaluate the impact of the initial phase of the campaign, particularly among youth and parents of youth, two likely targets for the campaign.

The survey is comprised of 2,132 completed cases, including 418 with youth who are 16 to 24, and 416 parents of youth. This randomly recruited probability sample would carry with it a margin of error of +/-2.19 per cent. The margin of error for each of the target groups is +/-4.8 per cent. The sample source is an in-house *Probit* panel of randomly recruited Canadians. The survey, administered largely online, was collected in September of 2017.

## ***Behaviour***

The large majority of Canadians (81 per cent) know someone who has used cannabis and more than half (56 per cent) have consumed cannabis themselves at some point in their lives (this is almost precisely the proportion measured in a national survey of Canadians conducted with Health Canada in early 2016 – 58 per cent). Of respondents who reported cannabis use, four in ten reported they are a recent cannabis user, having used it within in the past 12 months.

Of those reporting cannabis use, over one-quarter (28 per cent) reported they have operated a vehicle while under the influence. One in three Canadians also report that they have ridden in a vehicle operated by a driver who was under the effects of cannabis.

Among those who have driven while impaired, four in ten downplayed the risks by either indicating that driving while under the influence of cannabis is less dangerous than driving while under the influence of alcohol (25 per cent) or that driving while under the influence of cannabis poses no real risk (17 per cent). Another one in five claimed that they had no other options in terms of transportation (21 per cent). Just under this proportion attributed their decision to their poor judgement and lack of experience in their youth (19 per cent).

Among parents of children ages 13 to 24, one-third (34 per cent) reported that their child has used cannabis. Ten per cent also report that their children have ridden passenger to an impaired driver, although a full third were unsure.

Survey results reveal a greater discrepancy between how parents and youth recall discussing driving while under the influence of cannabis. Just one-quarter of youth said they have discussed the matter with their parents. In a sharp contrast, however, three-quarters of parents of youth said they have had this discussion with their children.

### ***Awareness and Concern for Risks***

Survey results reveal broad recognition of the impacts of cannabis on drivers. Fully eight in ten agree that using cannabis impairs one's driving ability (by comparison, 94 per cent say alcohol impedes driving ability). Three-quarters say that cannabis reduces reaction time and ability to concentrate and just over half (57 per cent) say that cannabis makes the user a worse driver. On the other end of the spectrum, however, one in ten (nine per cent) believe that cannabis makes the user a more careful driver and three per cent say cannabis consumption has no discernible impact on driving ability.

Two-thirds of Canadians (65 per cent) agree that cannabis users often fail to realize that they are impaired from using cannabis and one-quarter believe that the impacts of cannabis consumption are less detrimental to one's driving ability than the use of alcohol. A moderately high proportion of Canadians (59 per cent) also understand that it is not always easy to tell whether a cannabis user is too high to drive.

Leading concerns when it comes to driving safety include distracted driving (84 per cent), followed by driving while impaired by alcohol, cannabis or prescription drugs (67 per cent), and aggressive driving at 63 per cent. Looking more closely at the level of concern for impairment specifically from cannabis, considerably fewer expressed concern (47 per cent), compared with impairment from alcohol (79 per cent).

Slightly more than half of respondents (53 per cent) indicated concern about drivers who are impaired from cannabis use. A clear majority of respondents (70 per cent) believe the rate of driving under the influence of cannabis will increase if the drug becomes legal. The most pressing concerns over driving under the influence include hurting someone else (73 per cent), followed by getting hurt, becoming paralyzed or getting killed themselves (50 per cent), or just generally getting into an accident (48 per cent). Having a permanent criminal record (29 per cent), or getting caught by police (14 per cent) form a third tier of concern, although this concern is much more prevalent among youth.

Although more than three in four respondents said they would not get into a vehicle with an impaired driver, 11 per cent said they would be likely to do so (and significantly more reported that they have done so in the past). Compared with reasons for driving impaired, passengers are much more likely to be concerned for their own well-being. More than eight in ten said they would be concerned about getting hurt, becoming paralyzed or getting killed in an accident. Fewer (57 per cent) would be concerned about hurting, paralyzing or killing someone else. Compared with the driver, passengers are significantly less concerned about getting caught by police or having a permanent record (10 per cent citing each).

### ***Normalized Behaviour***

Two in three respondents expect that most teenagers and young adults will try cannabis. A clear majority (79 per cent), however, said they do not see driving under the influence of cannabis as acceptable. Results are more split in terms of whether it is relatively more acceptable compared to driving under the influence of alcohol (40 per cent said it is the case).

Although half of respondents reported that it is rare for people they know to drive under the influence, another 15 per cent said it is common, and the same proportion said that it is moderately common. The majority (70 per cent) said they would be comfortable trying to stop a friend or family member from driving under the influence, and a similar proportion (74 per cent) would be comfortable trying to stop a friend or family member from accepting a ride from a driver who they thought was impaired after using cannabis. Respondents are less comfortable in reporting an impaired driver to the police; although 37 per cent said they would be comfortable, the same proportion said they would not be.

### ***Information about Cannabis Impaired Driving***

The incidence of searching for information on the effects of drugs on driving ability is relatively low, with just three in ten respondents saying they have searched for this information. By a wide margin, health professionals come out as the most trusted source of information on the impacts of cannabis on driving ability, selected by more than half of respondents (57 per cent). Three in ten (32 per cent), meanwhile, say they are likely to speak with someone in law enforcement. Although only one in seven (15 per cent) would consult with a friend or turn to a teacher, counsellor, or social worker (12 per cent), these are much more likely sources among youth.

In terms of online sources, just under half (46 per cent) cited the Internet in general (with no mention of a specific organization) as a go-to source for information regarding the effects of drugs on driving ability. Three in ten (31 per cent), meanwhile, would consult a Government of Canada website. One-quarter would turn to driving associations such as the Canadian Automobile

Association, a police organization, or a not-for-profit group such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving Canada.

Three-quarters of Canadians are interested in learning more about the effects of cannabis on driving ability. About two-thirds are curious about the length of time before it is safe to drive after using drugs. About half (56 per cent) would also like more information about how the police test for drugs or about the laws and penalties regarding driving while impaired (50 per cent). One-third are interested in learning about their rights as a driver should they be pulled over.

Four in ten (42 per cent) Canadians say they have enough information to make informed decision about the risks of driving while under the influence. Canadians are decidedly sure they have adequate information from a Canadian context that has been made available to them. Just one-third (32 per cent) said they feel the availability of Canadian information is adequate for informed decision-making about risks.

### ***Views on Legal Status and Implications***

Although fully eight in ten (83 per cent) recognize that it is currently illegal to operate a vehicle while under the influence, one in twenty (five per cent) believe it to be legal. Canadians are slightly more uncertain about how impaired driving laws will be impacted by the upcoming legalization of cannabis. While three-quarters (76 per cent) recognize that driving under the influence will remain illegal, a small percentage (seven per cent) believe that driving while under the influence will be legal at that time.

Canadians are very unsure about the amount of time a driver should wait before getting behind the wheel after consuming cannabis before it is safe to operate a vehicle. In fact, more than four in ten respondents (43 per cent) said they were uncertain and about one in six underestimate the time (indicating that fewer than three hours is safe).

Results further suggest that Canadians are unsure about whether police can detect impairment from cannabis among drivers who are stopped at the roadside. Just under half (45 per cent) correctly believe that police are capable of determining whether a driver is impaired from cannabis, although one-quarter do not and one in three are unsure.

Many Canadians are also unclear about whether penalties associated with driving while impaired from cannabis are greater, lesser, or equivalent to those associated with driving while impaired from alcohol. Just under half (47 per cent) believe that impairment from cannabis and impairment from alcohol carry the same penalties. One in eight, however, believe the penalties to be less strict than those regarding alcohol, and one in three said they do not know.

Just over half of Canadians (55 per cent) believe that existing penalties are sufficiently strict to deter impaired driving. One-third (33 per cent), however, disagree.

Half of respondents (48 per cent) are unsure as to whether the federal government will be revising its laws around driving under the influence, although four in ten (38 per cent) believe the Government of Canada will be proposing new laws. One in four Canadians believe that stricter laws would have a significant impact on impaired driving, although three in ten do not think that the laws would have much effect. Four in ten believe that stiffer penalties would yield a moderate impact.

## ***Youth Profile***

### **Behaviour**

- Results highlight the importance of youth, between the ages of 16 and 24 as a key target group for a public education campaign. Although still seven in ten, fewer youth than the Canadian average reported friends who have used cannabis. Just under half (45 per cent) have themselves used it, which is lower than the national average. But, most of these (65 per cent) have used it in the past 12 months, making them recent users, just on the cusp of becoming the most prevalent users, like their 25 to 34 year old counterparts. Overall, across all youth, 29 per cent are recent cannabis users (last 12 months), 16 per cent have used it in the past but not recently and 54 per cent have never used it.
- Slightly fewer than average have driven while cannabis impaired (22 per cent of those who have used it; 10 per cent among all youth). But, more of those who have done so said they did it because they do not consider it to be dangerous, or at least not as dangerous as driving while impaired from alcohol (57 per cent).
- Like other Canadians, one in three of all youth have been a passenger with a cannabis impaired driver, also highlighting the risk for this age cohort.
- Parents of youth have a fairly good estimation of cannabis use among youth, but they significantly underestimate the extent of impaired driving, or accepting a ride with a cannabis impaired driver. Large proportions of parents also admit that they do not know whether or not their child has done these things.

### **Awareness and Concern**

- A public education campaign targeting this age group can build on a solid base of appreciation for the compromise to safety that impaired driving poses. But, youth, like other age groups are much more likely to be concerned about impairment from alcohol on the roads, rather than from cannabis, since 88 per cent of youth point to impairment when asked about alcohol, but only 49 per cent say the same when asked about cannabis.

- Other results point to the same pattern of assumption that impairment from cannabis is not as compromising or serious as impairment from alcohol in terms of driving ability.
- Similarly, almost half of youth (44 per cent) believe it is easy to tell if someone is too high to drive, and youth are generally somewhat less concerned about the risk cannabis impairment poses on the roads than expressed by other Canadians.
- Key to any approach to the campaign or specific messaging, youth, like other Canadians are more concerned with hurting, paralyzing or killing others than themselves, as an impaired driver (66 per cent). But, in contrast to other age cohorts, youth are also more concerned than others with having a permanent record (40 per cent) or generally getting caught by the police (22 per cent), fearing legal and long lasting repercussions. As a passenger, the fear is much more exclusively centred on getting hurt, becoming paralyzed or getting killed themselves. Even as a passenger, however, this cohort is more concerned than other age groups with a permanent record and/or getting caught.

### **Normalized Behaviour**

- Youth are among the two age groups most likely to see cannabis impaired driving as more socially acceptable than driving under the influence of alcohol (50 per cent). On the other hand, they also report limited occurrences of cannabis impaired driving in their own social circles, and few see this as acceptable among their friends, unlike their 25 to 34 year old counterparts, again highlighting an age group on the cusp.
- Messaging may consider a “friends don’t let friends drive....” approach given that youth are the least comfortable of all age groups to stop someone they know from driving while under the influence of cannabis or accepting a ride from a cannabis impaired driver. They are also the least likely to be comfortable reporting issues to the police, although relatively small minorities of Canadians are comfortable with this across all age groups.

### **Information**

- Like other Canadians, three in ten youth report having looked for information on the effects of drugs on driving ability.
- They report health professionals (56 per cent), but also law enforcement, friends, parents and teachers (24 to 30 per cent) as preferred sources for getting information.
- They expect to turn to the Internet in large numbers, pointing most often to the Government of Canada (45 per cent), although NGO’s, drivers’ associations and provinces are also recognized sources.
- Key information sought is specifics about effects on ability, as well as recommended time to wait after use before driving. But, understanding the law and penalties as well as how police test for drug use are also key points of interest.

## **Awareness of Legal Implications**

- Like other Canadians, few youth think it is currently legal to drive while under the influence of cannabis, although slightly more than average are uncertain (21 per cent) about the legal status when cannabis becomes legalized in 2018. Many are also uncertain about whether there will be new, stricter restrictions in place to prevent impaired driving in 2018.
- One in three say they do not know how long is a safe amount of time to wait before driving after cannabis use, and another 23 per cent underestimate the time to be less than three hours.
- Youth are most likely across all age groups (55 per cent), however, to understand that the police are able to detect impairment from cannabis, possibly accounting for some of the elevated concern for getting caught. Six in ten also say that they believe current penalties are sufficient to prevent people from driving. Stricter new penalties in 2018 are seen as having at least a moderate positive impact on reducing the incidence of impaired driving according to seven in ten (40 per cent saying the impact will be moderate and 31 per cent saying it will be significant).

The contract value for the POR project is \$175,633.64 (including HST).

Supplier Name: EKOS Research Associates

PWGSC Contract : OD160-18-2537/001/CY

Contract Award Date: August 25, 2017

To obtain more information on this study, please e-mail

[TPSGC.Questions-Questions.PWGSC@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca](mailto:TPSGC.Questions-Questions.PWGSC@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca)

## POLITICAL NEUTRALITY CERTIFICATION

This certification is to be submitted with the final report submitted to the Project Authority.

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of EKOS Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research.

Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

**Signed by:** Susan Galley (Vice President)