Cannabis Use
What Albertans Need to Know

Cannabis is a psychoactive drug derived from the cannabis sativa plant that was legalized for adults 18 years or over in October 2018. Cannabis has two major chemical components—tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD). THC, the major psychoactive chemical in cannabis, can increase the risk of depression, anxiety, and psychosis. CBD does not have mind-altering effects and has been used to treat pain, seizures, nausea, and muscle spasms.

Effects of Cannabis Use

Different people have different experiences with cannabis use. Some may feel relaxed, talkative, and euphoric, while others may feel confused or anxious after use. There are some physical effects of cannabis too. These include redness in the eyes, increase in heart rate, dry mouth, loss of balance, and decrease in blood pressure. The therapeutic uses of cannabis help regulate nausea in chemotherapy patients, appetite, pain and depressed mood and insomnia.

Is Cannabis Addictive?

Yes! Though it is less addictive than nicotine or alcohol, with heavy use, individuals still may experience withdrawal, increased tolerance, and dependence. Those who develop psychological dependence may feel anxious if they cannot get it.

If used regularly for a long period of time, individuals could develop physical dependence, which causes mild withdrawal symptoms if they stop using it. These symptoms can include anxiety, upset stomach, sweating, loss of appetite and disturbed sleep.

Who is Vulnerable?

Individuals most vulnerable to cannabis use include people who are pregnant, under 25, impulsive, have psychiatric disorders or cardiovascular problems, are male, and those with a history of psychosis. Heavy cannabis use in individuals under 25 has been linked to negative life outcomes and decreased cognitive functioning.

Treatments that Work

Psychotherapy –
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) helps individuals identify and correct problematic behaviours by applying a range of different skills that can be used to stop excessive cannabis use.

Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET) evokes motivated change while addressing any hesitation toward treatment and recovery.

Contingency Management includes giving the patient rewards to reinforce their positive behaviours.

Resources Self-help strategies for cutting down or stopping substance use: A guide (World Health Organization)
10 ways to reduce risks to your health when using Cannabis (CAMH)
Cannabis (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health)

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