Many Older Adults Support Marijuana for Medical Use but Want to See More Research

People between ages 50 and 80 are OK with prescription cannabis.

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Marijuana is most commonly known as a recreational drug, but many doctors prescribe it for the treatment of cancer and chronic pain, among many other conditions. Now, new findings from the National Poll on Healthy Aging reveal that many older adults approve of using pot if a doctor recommends the drug as a treatment, reports the University of Michigan (U-M).

U-M's Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation conducted the poll, which asked a national sample of 2,007 Americans ages 50 to 80 about marijuana use for medical purposes, its perceived benefits, how the drug compares to prescription pain medicine and their support for marijuana-related policies.

Four out of five respondents favored using medical marijuana on a physician's recommendation; 64 percent of poll respondents believed that more government-sponsored research on cannabis's health effects was needed; and nearly half of those surveyed felt that prescription pain medication was more effective than marijuana while 14 percent believed the opposite.

In addition, nearly 70 percent of folks polled said they'd definitely or probably ask their doctor about marijuana if they developed a serious medical condition that might respond to the drug. But only 18 percent thought their provider was knowledgeable about medical marijuana, 7 percent disagreed and 75 percent were unsure.

"While just 6 percent of our poll respondents said they'd used marijuana for medical purposes themselves, 18 percent said they know someone who has," said Preeti Malani, MD, director of the poll and a specialist in geriatric care at the University of Michigan.

Researchers concluded that these findings emphasize why clinicians should routinely ask elderly patients about their use of marijuana and the need for them to become knowledgeable about the medical benefits and harms associated with pot.

Click here to learn how marijuana may safely treat some mental illnesses.

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