

Vermont Young Adult Survey 2018: Overview of Methods and Findings

Background

The 2018 Vermont Young Adult Survey (YAS) was conducted by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) to support the statewide evaluation of Vermont's Regional Prevention Partnerships (RPP) project. The survey was also conducted by PIRE in 2014 and 2016. Because the survey provides useful epidemiologic data for purposes other than the evaluation, PIRE provides statewide summaries of the survey data to VDH. This overview presents some selected findings from recently completed summaries. More details regarding the YAS methods, along with various tables, reports, and presentations, are available through the link provided at the end of this document.

Methods

The target population for this online survey was Vermont residents aged 18 to 25. Respondents were recruited through Facebook ads, a strategy that has proven to be a cost-effective means of reaching large numbers of young adults across the state. Drawings for cash awards provided an incentive to participate. A sample of 2365 young adults was obtained for the 2018 survey; sample sizes in 2014 and 2016 were slightly higher. Survey items focused on self-reported use of various substances, perceptions regarding their availability and the level of risk from using them, exposure to prevention messages, and respondent demographic characteristics. The data were weighted to reflect the young adult population of Vermont with respect to age group, sex, and county. The accuracy of the findings is supported by the fact that estimates for key measures match closely with those obtained for Vermont young adults from the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse.

Key Findings

The findings below are based on the 2018 survey data unless indicated otherwise.

Alcohol Use

- In 2018 about 75% of young adults reported using alcohol in the past 30 days, up slightly (but not significantly) from 2016. Two thirds of those who used alcohol reported binge drinking.
- Rates for both any alcohol use and binge drinking were significantly higher for persons aged 21 and over compared to persons aged 18 to 20.
- Alcohol is perceived by 33% of young adults as being somewhat easy or very easy for underage persons to obtain in stores, and by 20% as being somewhat easy or very easy to be served in bars and restaurants. Both rates are significantly higher than those found in 2016.

Tobacco Use and Electronic Vaping Devices

- About 21% of young adults reporting using cigarettes in the past 30 days. A similar percentage reporting using e-cigarettes or other electronic vaping products (EVPs).
- Younger respondents aged 18 to 20 were significantly more likely to use EVPs and significantly less likely to use cigarettes than young adults aged 21 and older. Males were more likely than females to use both of these products.

Marijuana Use

- Past 30-day marijuana use among young adults increased from 39% in 2014 to 44% in 2018.
- In 2018 almost half (45%) of users reported using 20 or more days in the past 30 days.
- Significantly higher percentages of users reported using marijuana in ways other than smoking it in 2018 compared to 2016 (e.g., consumption, vaping, and dabbing).

- Some 56% of young adults reported that marijuana was very easy to obtain in 2018, up significantly from 52% in 2016.
- Just over 80% of young adults perceived either no risk or only slight from smoking marijuana once or twice a week, up significantly from 74% in 2014.
- Marijuana use in the past 30 days was higher among males than females.
- Younger (ages 18 to 20) and older (ages 21 to 25) young adults had similar rates of any use in the past 30 days, but older persons were significantly more likely to have used 20 or more days.

Prescription Drug Misuse

- Misuse of prescription pain relievers in the past year was reported by 3.5% of young adults in 2018, which was significantly lower than the 7.7% reporting pain reliever misuse in 2014 and 6.2% in 2016.
- Misuse rates for other prescription drug types have not changed appreciably since 2014.
- The misuse rate for prescription stimulants (12.3%) was considerably higher than that for both prescription sedatives (5%) and prescription pain relievers (3.5%).
- The perceived ease of obtaining prescription pain relievers without a prescription has declined significantly since 2014.

Exposure to Prevention Messages and Resources

- In 2018, just over 55% of young adults reported seeing or hearing information about safe storage and disposal of prescription drugs in the past year. This was significantly higher than the rates found in 2014 (32%) and 2016 (38%).
- Even so, 63% of respondents did not know whether there was a prescription drug drop box within five miles of where they lived. The percent reporting that there was a drop box within five miles of where they lived was 25%, while 12% reported there was not a drop box within five miles.

For More Information...

A website maintained by PIRE provides easy access to reports and data tables from the Young Adult Survey, as well as for other materials developed for the evaluation of the RPP and its predecessor, Partnerships for Success (PFS). These materials can be accessed at:

www.vt-rpp-evaluation.org

Questions regarding the survey or any of the findings presented here or posted on the RPP evaluation website should be directed to Amy Livingston at 802-652-4111, or alivingston@pire.org.

The Young Adult Survey was conducted for the Vermont Department of Health, Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs, by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE). Funding was provided by Vermont's Partnerships for Success II and Partnerships for Success 2015 (also referred to in Vermont as Regional Prevention Partnerships, or RPP) grants from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The time and willingness of all respondents to participate in the survey is gratefully acknowledged.