

# Changing attitudes toward cannabis legalisation in Australia – untangling the effects of age, period and cohort

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## Background and aims:

In October 2016, Australia introduced major cannabis policy reform to enable access to medicinal cannabis across the country. In January 2020, the Australia Capital Territory becomes the first Australian jurisdiction to legalise the possession, use and cultivation of small amounts of cannabis.

This study aims to unpack trends in overall cannabis policies related sentiments and its potential impact on cannabis use in Australia. The present study analysed 15 years of Australian survey data to provide important information in relation to the ongoing debates about trends in cannabis legalisation and cannabis use in Australia.



Sample

The study utilised a series of the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) collected between 2004 and 2016. The present study included a total of 117,932 participants aged 18 to 85 years.



Measures

The primary independent variables measured age, period and birth cohort memberships. We analysed the effects of age, period and cohort on individual-level of cannabis-related attitudes using a weighted Hierarchical Age Period Cohort (HAPC) model proposed by Yang and Land.

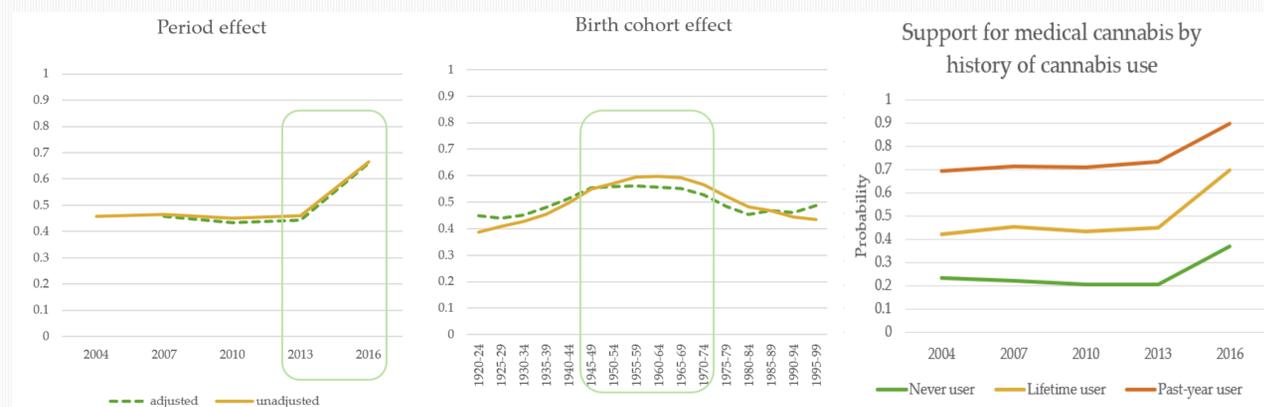


Analysis

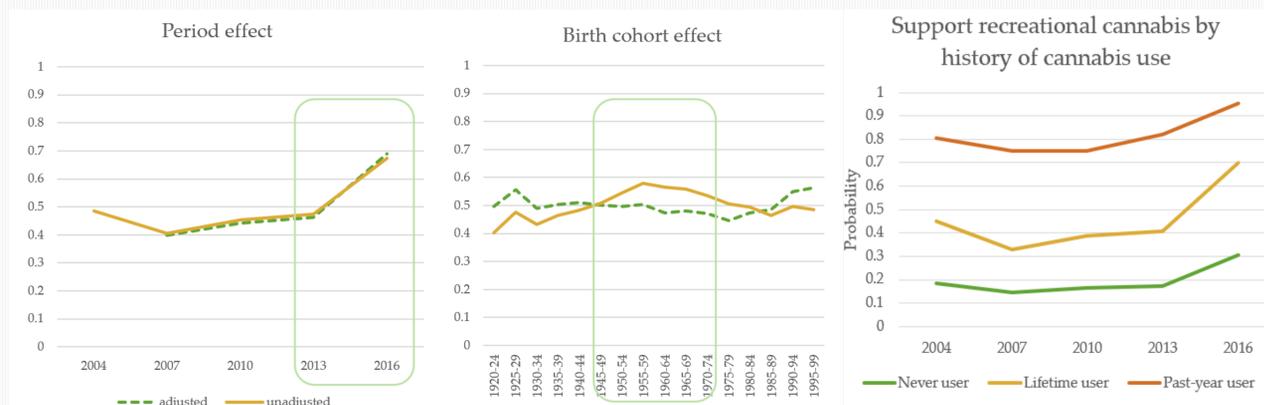
The mixed (fixed and random) effects model statistically characterised the contextual effects unique to the survey period and cohort memberships, revealing the process by which individuals' lives are shaped by their unique experience and environment.

## Results

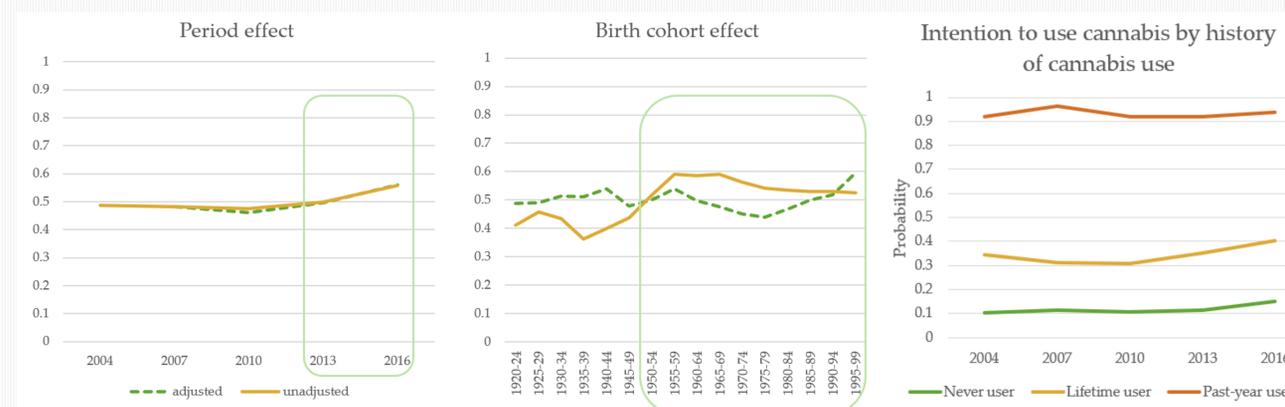
### 1. Support or strongly support medical cannabis legalisation



### 2. Support or strongly support recreational cannabis legalisation



### 3. Would try or use cannabis if it become legal



## Discussion

We found unambiguous evidence of a significant period effect on pro-legalisation views since 2013. Such shift in attitudes were accompanied by increases in adults expressing their interest in using cannabis when it became legal.

The attitudes toward recreational cannabis legalisation and intention to use cannabis were similar across birth cohorts after adjusting for history of cannabis use, suggesting the positive attitudes toward full legalisation and cannabis use was a broad-based warming in the Australian adult population. The probability of people using cannabis in the past year to continue using cannabis remain high and stable. We noted some increases in people who have never used or have not used cannabis in recent times expressed their interests to use cannabis after legalisation, suggesting legalisation may have motivated non-cannabis-using individuals to initiate or resume using cannabis.

The prevalence of cannabis use increased soon after legalisation, as seen in the US and Canada. There are also some evidence of increased traffic mortality and presentations to emergency departments involving cannabis after legalisation. Unlike the fully commercialised cannabis market in the US and to some extent in Canada, cannabis accessibility including medicinal cannabis remains limited in Australia. The potential increases in new cannabis use warranted the focus on harm reduction strategies (e.g. regulation of packaging, product potency, pricing through taxation and distribution of retail outlets) as cannabis products are anticipated to be become more accessible in Australia.

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