



Research Findings **Cannabis Consumer Survey**

June 4, 2024

LCB Research Program

The Research Program at the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (LCB) is a non-partisan, transparent resource focused on public safety and health outcomes related to the products, policy, and regulation of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and vapor products. The following results are independent from any specific LCB division or individual.

For questions or information about the Research Program, please contact:

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Overview

The following report summarizes findings from a survey developed in collaboration between LCB and the Washington State Department of Health (DOH)¹. The goal of this survey was to inform future education efforts to increase the health and safety of adults who use cannabis. All cannabis retail license holders were notified of the survey via an email listserv and were asked to display a flyer promoting a link to the survey in their store. Responses were anonymous and gathered between December 18, 2023 and January 12, 2024.

Please note this summary does not comprehensively describe all survey results. For questions or further information, please contact the LCB team involved in this survey including Sarah Okey (Research Program Manager), Kristen Haley (Public Health Education Liaison), and Brian McQuay (Data Consultant Supervisor).

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¹ This survey received an exempt determination from the Washington State Institutional Review Board.

Key Takeaways

Interest in Educational Information

There was both [willingness and interest to receive information](#) on cannabis products and ways to make cannabis use safer. This is a positive finding because reducing higher-risk behaviors is more easily achieved when there is overall openness towards education.

Avenues to Provide Education

Cannabis packaging/labels and retail employees (e.g., budtenders) were the two best [points-of-education](#) identified by consumers for providing information. In general, consumers indicated almost always looking at labels as well as talking to budtenders.

Packaging and Labels

Consumers reported looking at [packaging and labels](#) for a variety of reasons (e.g., to find the strain/cultivar name and THC concentration) and expressed interest in additional information about products they buy. For example, survey participants expressed interest in knowing about growing mediums, solvents, harvest/packaging dates, whether the product is organic, terpene profiles, and information about the producer. Consumers were also interested in learning more about how to read labels. This finding indicates cannabis packaging and labels may be a useful method for relaying information but efforts to make them easier to understand may also be important. Using cannabis packaging and labels to communicate information may be especially useful given an individual sees packaging and labels with every purchase and use of a product.

Budtender Knowledge

[Budtenders](#) are a primary point of contact with consumers, which provides another potential source for cannabis education. However, low scores from the [knowledge check](#) portion of the survey underscore the importance of increasing evidence-based education for employees. For example, more than 60% of retail employees did not correctly answer that only medically compliant cannabis products are required to be tested for heavy metals. Notably, retail employees generally answered questions more accurately than non-employees.

Areas of Interest

Results showed consumers consider several factors when determining which products they purchase. These behaviors may provide opportunities for future harm reduction efforts. For example, providing education on which factors contribute to positive effects of cannabis may help consumers de-emphasize THC concentration and focus on other relevant characteristics (e.g., the way the products looks and smells), which in turn may promote safer use.

Summary

This survey provides a positive and preliminary outlook that cannabis consumers and retail staff are interested in becoming more informed about cannabis products and ways to use cannabis more safely. Results indicate there is opportunity for increasing knowledge among cannabis consumers. Future work on how to increase effective and evidence-based information is important, especially within cannabis packaging/labels and budtenders.

Survey Results Overview

Participants

A total of 437 respondents legally able to purchase cannabis in Washington consented and participated in the survey. All responses were anonymous, voluntary, and self-reported.

The demographics of the respondents who completed the survey:

- **Average age was ~40 years old** (range was 21 to 90 years old)
- **Half identified as women** (49% women; 45% men; 5% non-binary; 1% other)
- **Majority were White** (76% White; 10% multiple ethnic-racial identities; 6% Hispanic/Latino), and
- **38% were cannabis employees²** (62% were cannabis consumers only)

People across Washington participated. The top five county participation rates were:

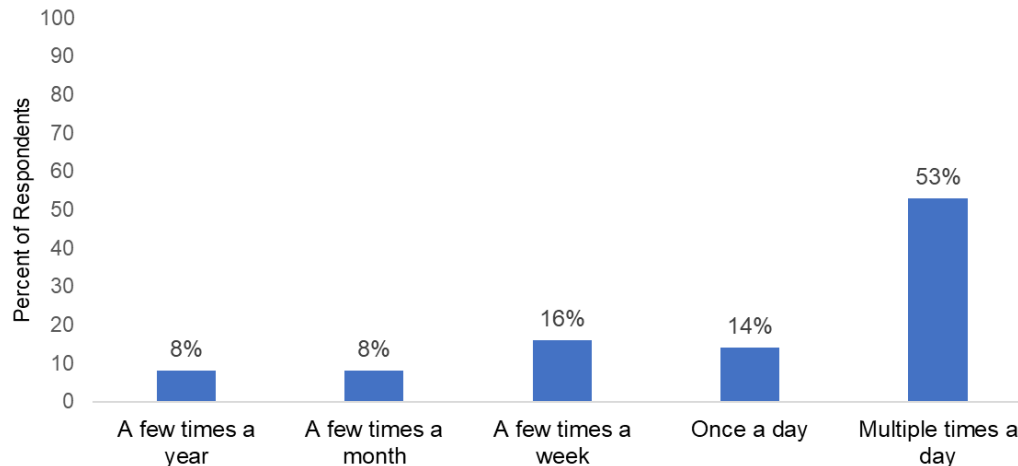
- 1) **King** County with 28% of survey respondents
- 2) **Pierce** County, with 9% of survey respondents
- 3) **Thurston** County, with 9% of survey respondents
- 4) **Snohomish** County, with 8% of survey respondents, and
- 5) **Whatcom** County, with 8% of survey respondents

This survey was not a representative sample of legal cannabis consumers in Washington and/or retail employees. However, survey participants were similar to Washington's [census data](#) related to prevalence of females, age distribution, percent White, and county population distribution for both King and Pierce County. Still, inferences about whether this survey reflects the broader population remain limited.

Cannabis Use Characteristics

The majority (67%) of individuals reported using cannabis at least once per day (Figure 1). Most respondents used in the evening or right before bed (Figure 2). Over half of participants typically used cannabis at home alone (88%) and with friends in private (57%) (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Current Frequency of Cannabis Use



² This paper refers to any individual who answered “yes” to “Are you an employee of the store or a licensee?” as an employee.

Figure 2. Typical Time of Day When Using Cannabis

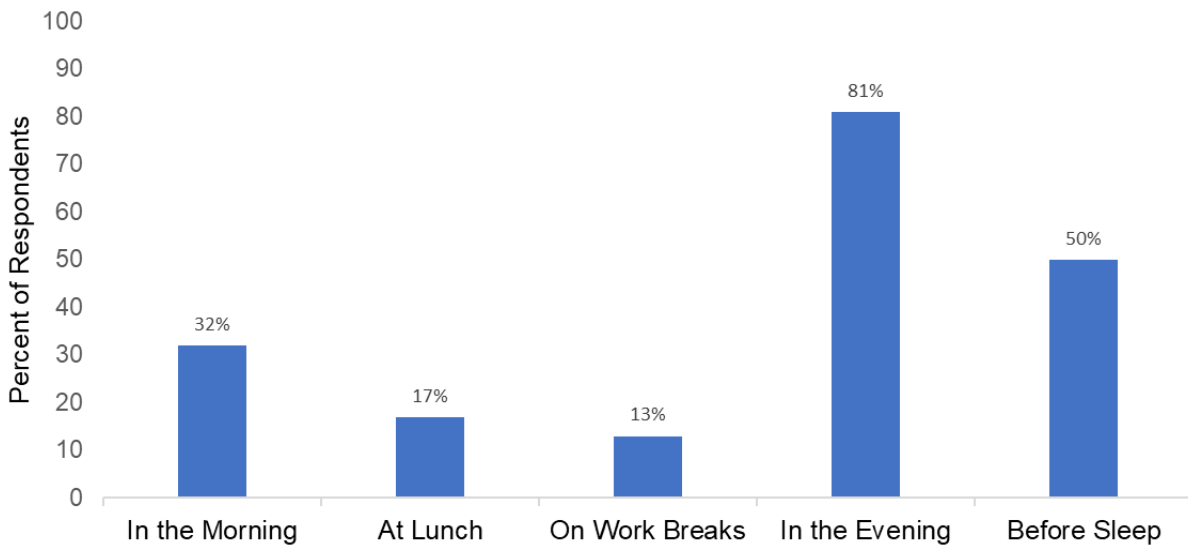
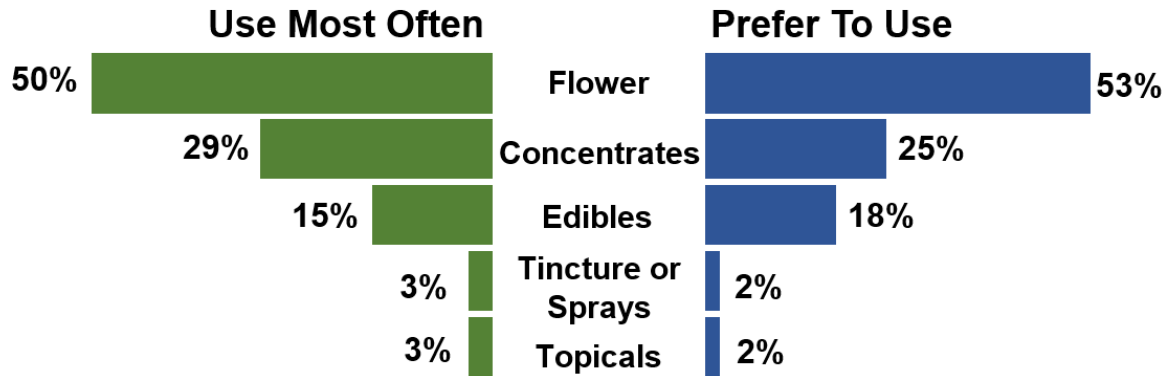


Figure 3. Typical Contexts When Using Cannabis



In general, survey respondents reported flower as both their preferred and most frequently used type of cannabis (Figure 4). Concentrates were the second most frequently used product, with vape pens/cartridges (38%) and wax (33%) being the most popular types of concentrate.

Figure 4. Types of Cannabis Products Typically and Most Frequently Used

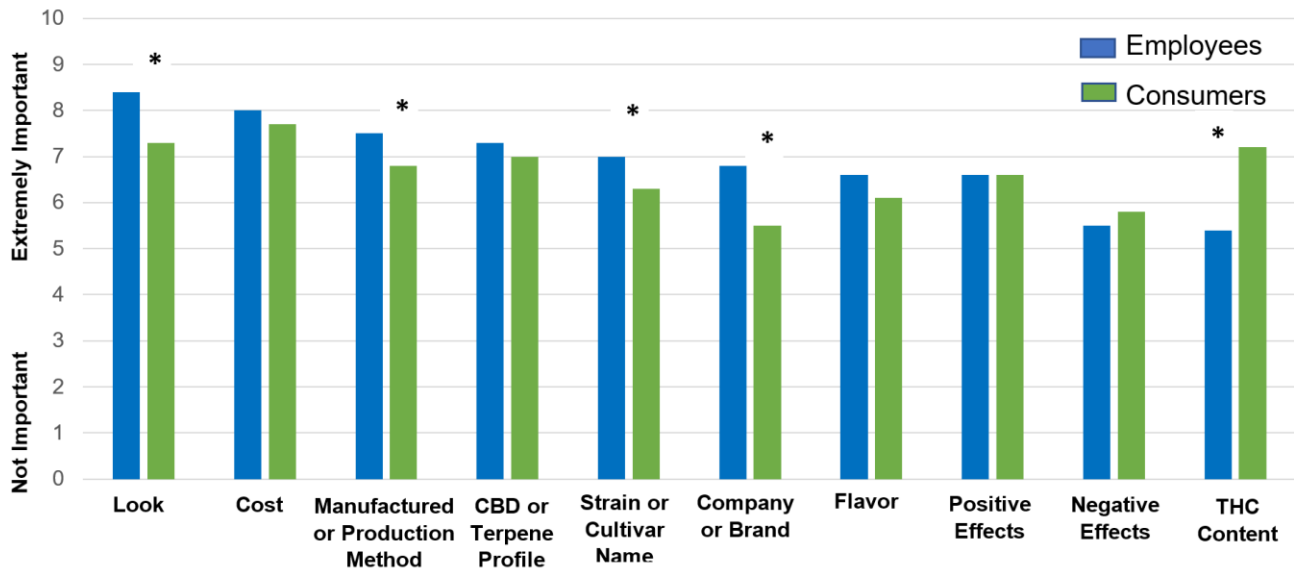


Note: Edibles included both solids (e.g., gummies) and liquids (e.g., drinks).

Purchasing Behaviors

Results showed cannabis consumers weigh several different factors when making decisions about what products to buy (Figure 5). Interestingly, cannabis store employees tended to weigh factors differently than non-employees. For example, employees rated THC concentration as the least important factor, whereas consumers rated THC concentration as one of the most important factors. In an open response question, many respondents also indicated that knowing whether the product was organic, date of harvest, product smell, and recognizing the producer and processor were important in buying decisions.

Figure 5. Considerations When Purchasing Cannabis



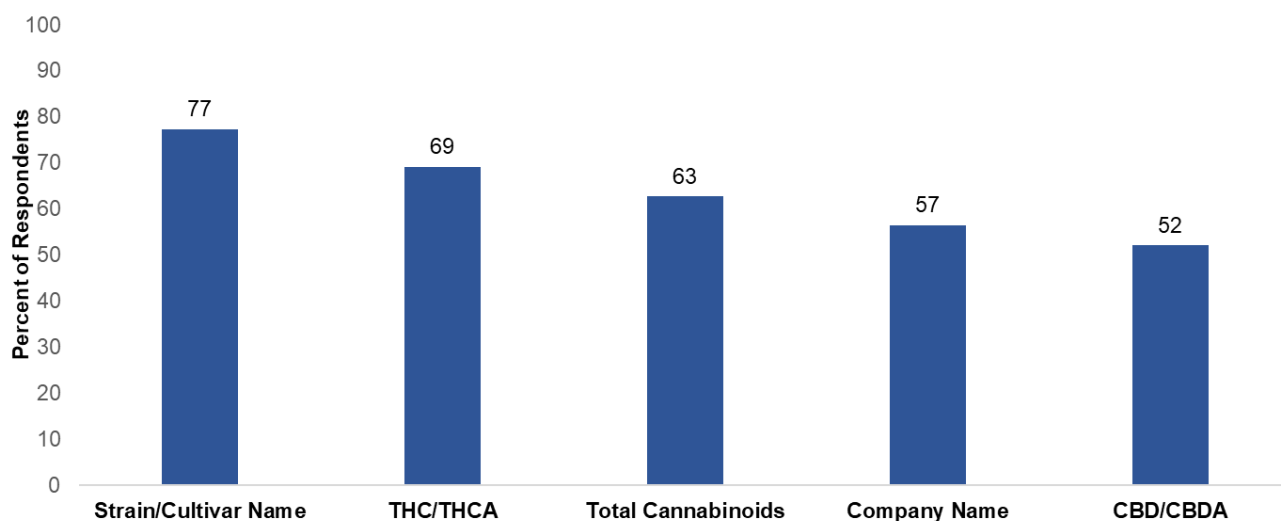
*Note: * indicates a statistically significant difference between employees and consumers at p < .05.*

Points-of-Education

The two most popular ways survey respondents receive information about cannabis products were through (1) product packaging and labels (39%), and (2) budtender (36%).

Product Packaging and Labels. Most respondents (84%) indicated reading the label of the cannabis product either “often” or “always”. The label elements most looked for included strain/cultivar name, THC/THCA content, total cannabinoids, company name, and CBD/CBDA content (Figure 6). A large percentage of respondents expressed interest in additional information on labels, such as growing mediums, solvents, whether it was organic, and harvest/packaging dates. Although most respondents rated cannabis labels as “understandable” or “very understandable,” 61% were interested in learning more about how to read labels.

Figure 6. Most Looked For Elements on Cannabis Labels

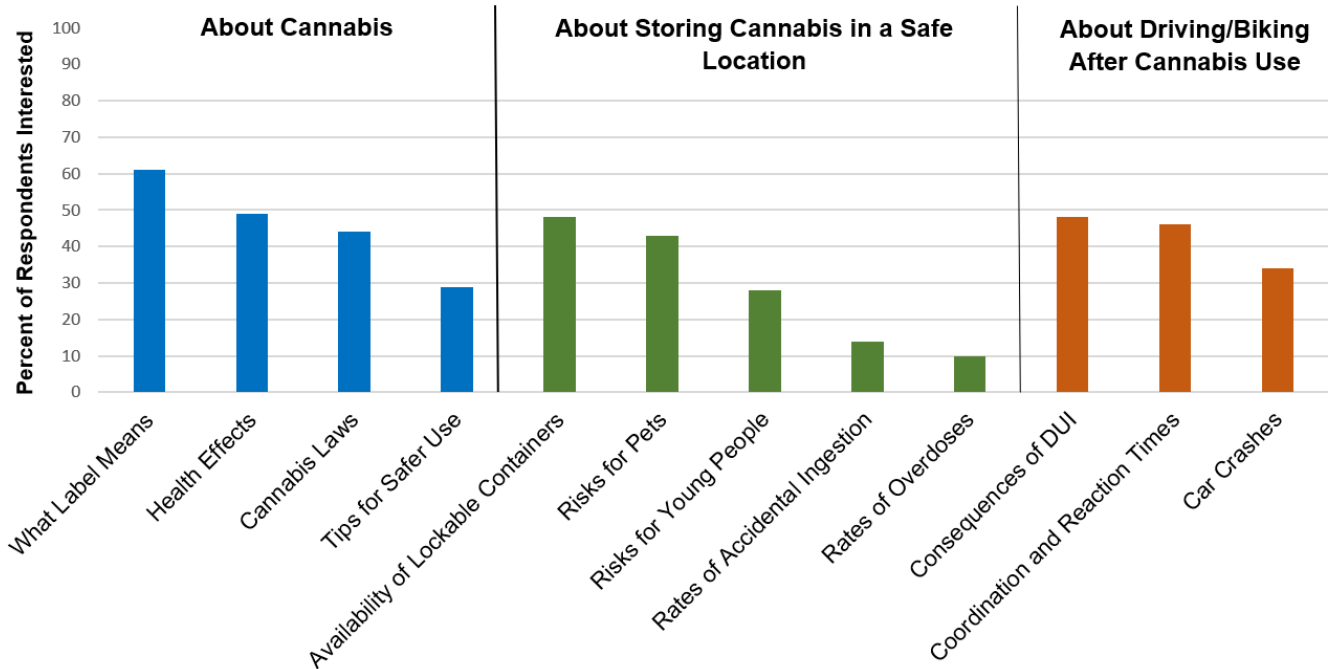


Budtenders. Most respondents (91%) reported asking budtenders about product information when buying cannabis. Over half of respondents reported budtenders were able to answer their questions about products either “always” (16%) or “usually” (47%). Two-thirds rated budtenders as being either “helpful” or “very helpful.” There were no differences between employees and non-employees on budtender ratings.

Educational Topic Areas

Half of survey respondents indicated being “interested” or “extremely interested” in receiving educational materials when making a purchase at a retail store (Figure 7). In addition to the items listed below, several respondents listed wanting to know information on growers, terpenes, pesticides, and medical benefits.

Figure 7. Topics of Interest



Current Knowledge Levels

Finally, respondents answered a series of questions to assess current level of knowledge related to cannabis. Among those who answered all seven questions, the average score was 57% for employees (about 4 out of 7 questions answered correctly) and 43% for non-employees (about 3 out of 7 questions answered correctly) (Table 1).

Table 1. Current Knowledge Levels

Question	Answer:	Percent Accurate	
		Employees	Non-Employees
What is the best way to determine strength of cannabis product?	THC	60%	66%
Are cannabis products required to be tested for foreign matter and contaminants (e.g., pesticides, mycotoxins)?	Yes	92%	66%
True or False: Only medically-compliant products are required to be tested for heavy metals.	True	37%	29%
How does medical cannabis differ from recreational cannabis?	Heavy Metals Testing Required	32%	25%
True or False: All dispensaries in WA sell cannabis for medical purposes	False	82%	54%
True or False: Cannabis products are approved by the FDA to treat, cure, and prevent disease	False	91%	81%
Where do you find lab test results for purchased cannabis?	By request at store	54%	22%

Future Directions

Survey findings highlight the need to increase knowledge for both cannabis consumers and retail employees. Two potential avenues for future education include (1) packaging and labels and (2) budtenders. Adding information to labels could be useful to provide quick education tips and provide further product information to consumers. Budtender training programs may also increase reliable and accurate information provided to consumers who legally purchase cannabis.