

# Youth Perspectives on Marijuana Use

Themes from Youth Listening Sessions

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**Public Health**  
Seattle & King County



# Overview

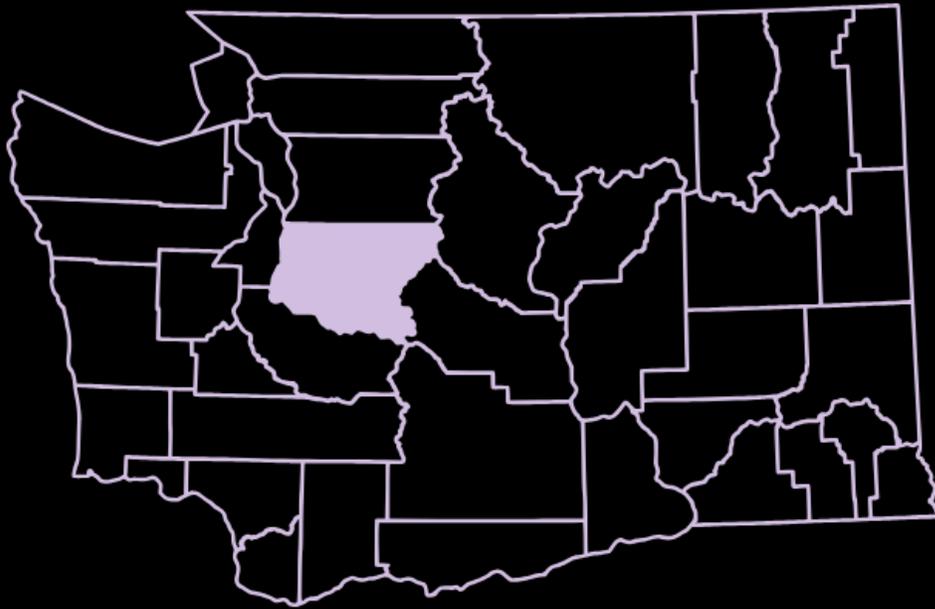
1. Context
2. Youth listening sessions
3. Themes from youth
4. Opportunities for prevention
5. Next steps for KC-YMPEP



# Context



# King County, WA



2+ million residents  
600,000 children & youth

Legalization of retail MJ: 2012

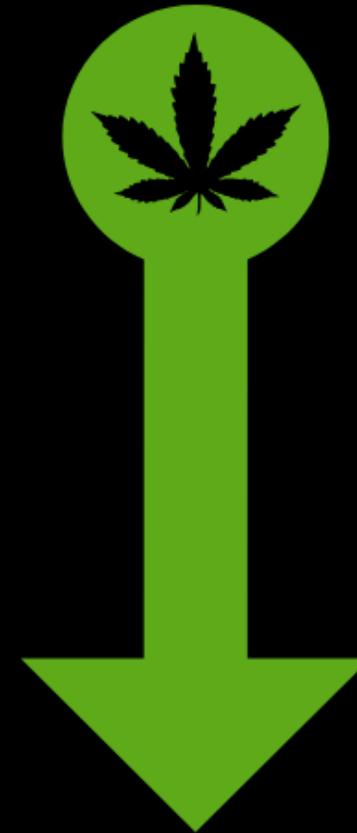


# Youth marijuana use in King County

Average youth use rate: 15%

10<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> grade use is declining

Fewer youth perceive regular use as risky



# Marijuana use can have long term effects on the developing brain

Other risks include:



Poorer school performance;  
negative impacts on memory,  
attention



Addiction (1 in 6 people who  
begin using prior to age 18)



Mental health issues (depression,  
anxiety, & more)



Crash risk (particularly when  
combined with alcohol)



Referrals to criminal justice system



# KC-YMPEP



Public Health – Seattle & King County  
King County Department of Community & Human Services

Funding: Washington DOH dedicated marijuana account

Goal: Reduce underage  
marijuana initiation & use



# 5 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

SPRING 2018



Input from community partners



Healthy Youth Survey data



Information from youth listening sessions



# Youth listening sessions



# Purpose

Learn about youth knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs around marijuana use

Gain insights on what information youth want and how to deliver it



\*Youth were asked to not disclose their personal use or the personal details of other youth who may use marijuana.



# Implementation

**18** partners

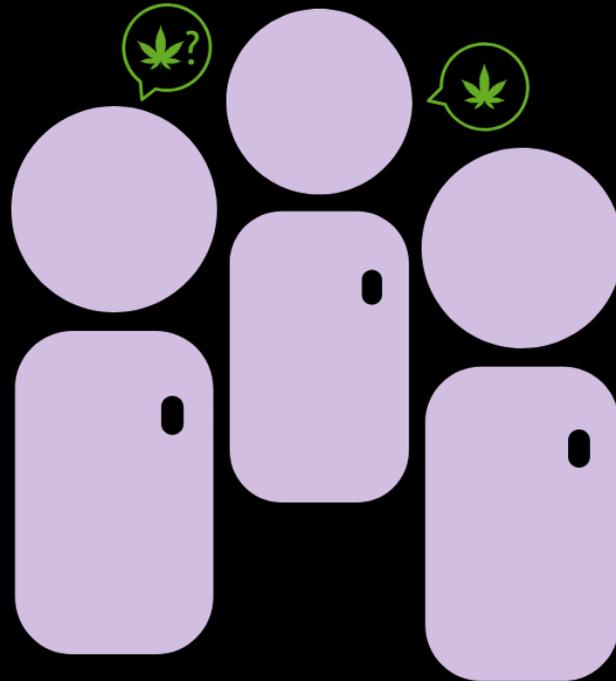
**26** listening sessions

- Focused on key demographics or priority populations
- KC-YMPEP: funding, training, & technical assistance
- Partners: session recruitment, facilitation, & transcription
- Coding and analysis conducted through NVIVO
- 2 additional sessions with young adults; similar findings



# Participant snapshot

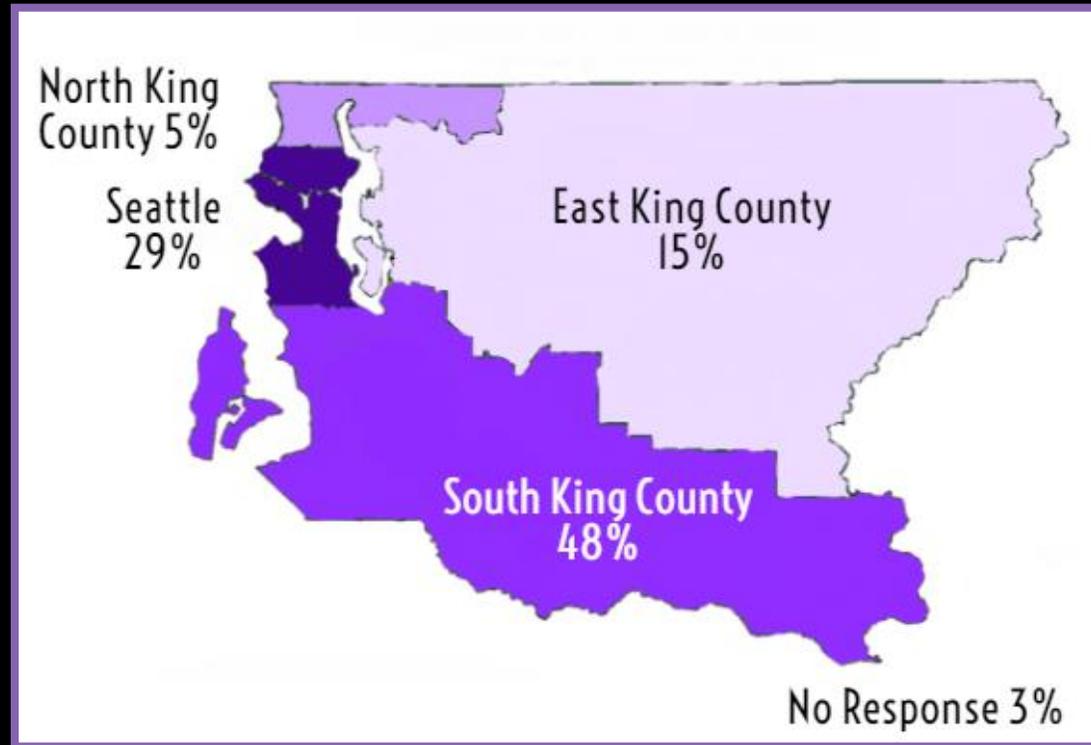
**202** youth participants  
**8** average # youth/group



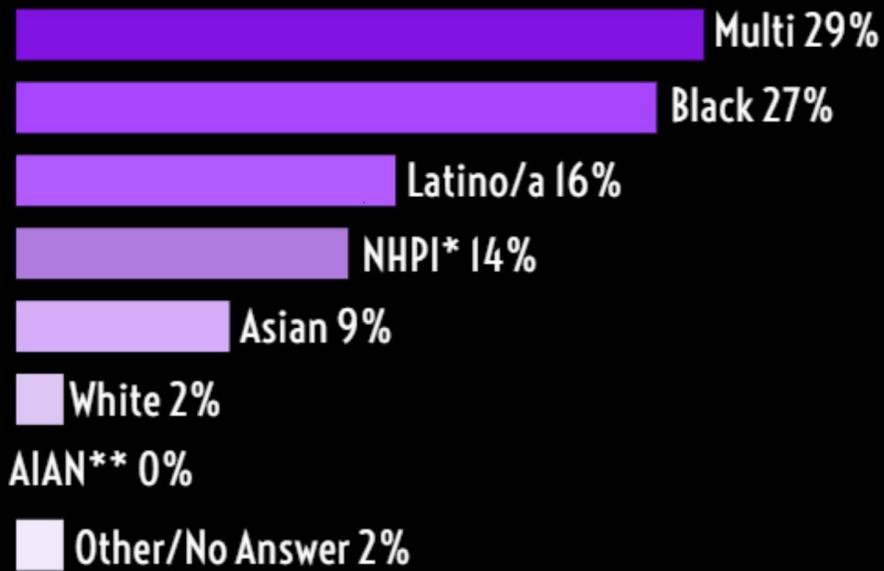
**15.2** average age (years)  
**9.6** average grade



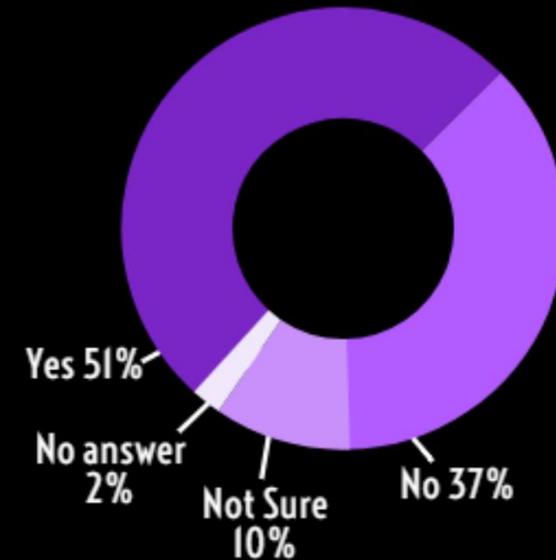
# Demographics: Geography



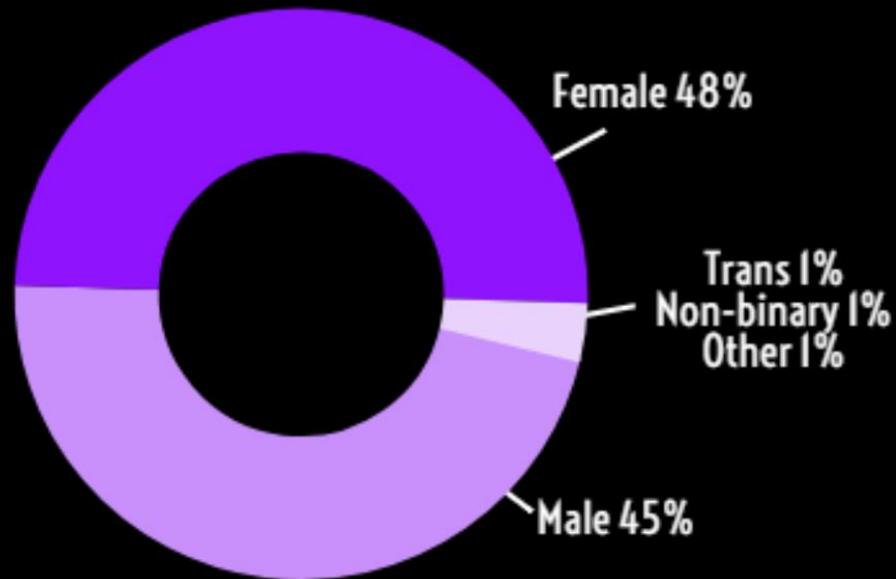
# Demographics: Race/Ethnicity & free/reduced lunch



\*Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander  
\*\*American Indian/Alaska Native



# Demographics: Gender & sexual orientation



Straight/Heterosexual: 84%  
Bisexual: 4%  
Gay/Lesbian: 3%  
Questioning: 1%  
Other: 4%  
No Response: 4%



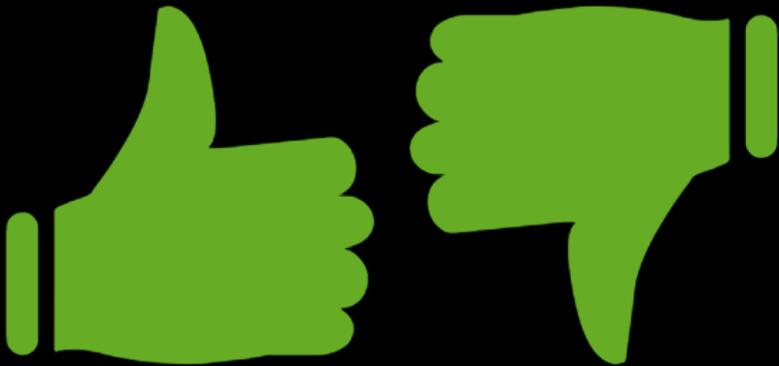
# Themes from youth





# Attitudes toward use

Most youth do not think marijuana use is a problem & have little concern for its risks



- Less concerned with the risks of marijuana use, more influenced by perceived popularity
- Marijuana is normalized
- Marijuana is not as bad as other substances, & has some benefits



# Perceptions of use

## Youth believe that many of their peers use marijuana



- Peer use rates estimated between 80 & 100% -- far above the HYS King County average of 15%
- Social media makes use seem common
- Rates of use are different for social versus regular users



# Access

## Youth think that marijuana is easy to get

- From personal connections: peers, siblings, person who sells
- Social media facilitates access
- Occasional access through parents



“ I think it’s just so popular nowadays, especially with our age group. So, even if you’re not close with anybody, you can just ask around and one out of three people are gonna have it.”



# Motivations for use

Youth use marijuana to follow social norms  
& to self-medicate

Other motivations: easy access, lack of  
protective factors, rebellion



# Motivations for use, continued

## Social norms:

- Peer pressure, curiosity, everyone else is doing it
- Social media & pop culture

## Self-medication:

- Escape
- Forget
- Relieve pain
- Deal with anger

“ [Youth] smoke marijuana for 2 reasons: either ‘cause others are doing it so they want to be cool and fit in. Or to relieve pain. There’s people going through struggles.”



# Motivations for avoiding use

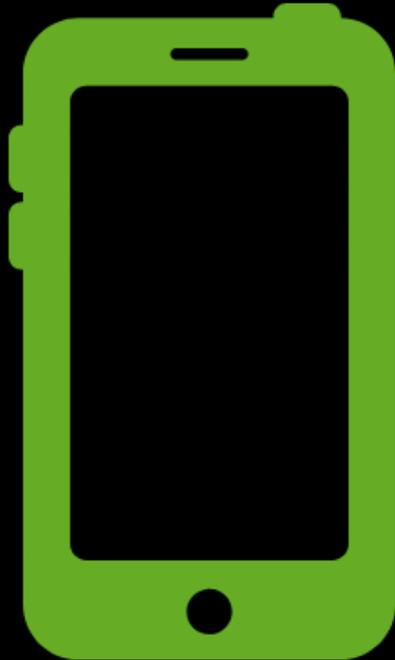
Personal values & protective factors may help prevent marijuana use



- Personal values: family, religious beliefs, sports, school, future goals
- Protective factors: engaged parents, non-using friends, involvement in activities, knowledge of risks
- Desire to avoid potential discipline, addiction, and other negative consequences



# Sources of information



Youth mostly rely on media, peers, school, & parents for information on marijuana.

- Common sources: Internet searches, social media, articles, advertisements, music
- Concerns of distrust and bias in all messages, especially those from:
  - Marijuana industry
  - Health educators
  - People who have never used marijuana

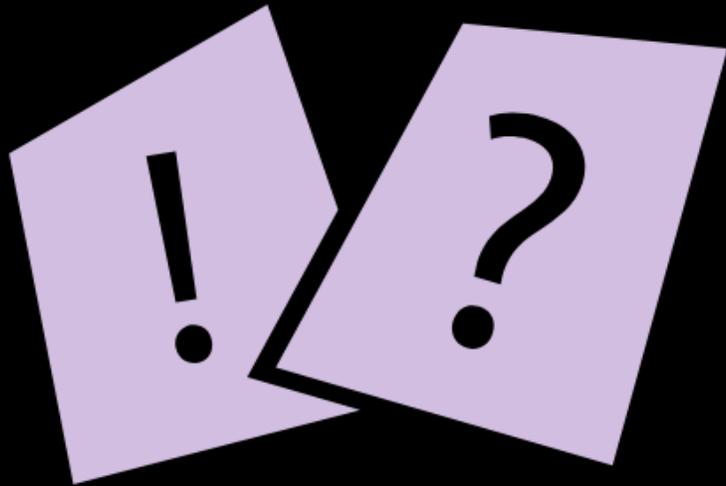


# Opportunities for prevention



# Information youth want

Youth want more unbiased information about marijuana



- How does marijuana work?
  - Long-term personal effects
  - Short-term effects
- Research & evidence about marijuana risks & benefits



🌿 Does it really help with stress?

🌿 How long does it stay in my body?

🌿 What are the before and after effects?

🌿 What does it do to my body and brain?

🌿 How does it make you feel?

🌿 Why is it so addictive?

🌿 Is cancer a side effect?

🌿 What will it do to my lungs?



# How to share risk messages

Youth want risk messages about marijuana shared in non-lecture formats



- Give unbiased information so that youth can decide
- Engage youth in open discussions
- Present messages where youth will see them (magazines, social media)
- Provide personal testimonies from former users
- Do not impose shame or rely on fear tactics

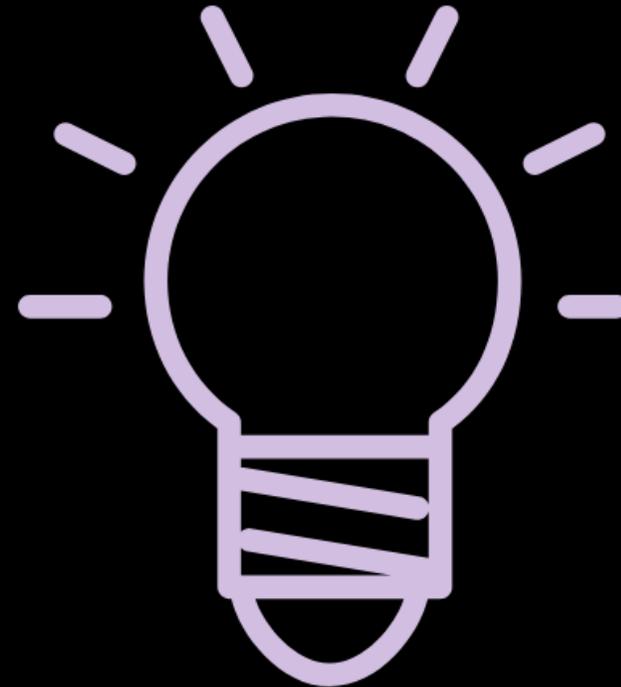


“ Adults have kind of exaggerated effects of marijuana to the point where teens want to exaggerate it in the other direction and say it's harmless... which isn't entirely true either. There aren't a lot of people who are very realistic about what it can and can't do.”



# Youth proposed strategies

- Invest in youth who self-medicate: provide opportunities & help develop long-term goals
- Broaden consequences beyond youth:
  - Penalize adults who sell
  - Increase prices and restrictions on marijuana advertisements



“ They don't have nothing else to do ... they don't have somebody in real life, somebody to be there for them to actually do things [with]. That can be their gateway. So, you need things in that community, where a kid could feel like he's wanted or something like that.”



# Limitations & next steps



# Limitations

- Themes are not generalizable
- Results were analyzed as a whole, not by specific demographic groups
- Varying facilitation styles
- Social desirability bias among youth participants



# The listening sessions were one step towards understanding and taking action on youth perceptions of marijuana use

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## Youth Marijuana Prevention Program

The King County Youth Marijuana Prevention and Education Program is a regional effort led by Public Health - Seattle & King County and the King County Department of Community and Human Services, with funding support from the Washington State Department of Health's dedicated marijuana account.

We look forward to working with community partners on this initiative to reduce underage marijuana initiation and use in King County.

- [Subscribe to our newsletter](#)
- [Learn about Marijuana, Alcohol & Drug Abuse Institute, Univ. of Washington](#)

### A parent's guide to preventing underage marijuana use

When it comes to protecting your child's health, it's important to remember your power as a parent. By knowing the facts, and using proven prevention strategies, you can help your child avoid using marijuana, alcohol, other drugs, and other risky behaviors.

This guide is available in PDF format in multiple languages and in hard copy format for organizations serving King County, WA residents.

- [English](#)
- [Amharic](#)
- [Somali](#)
- [Spanish](#)
- [Swahili](#)
- [Tigrigna](#)



For organizations serving King County residents, you may order up to 200 hard copies mailed to you for free. Please complete the form below in full. For other counties or states, please submit a request by email to the ADAI Clearinghouse at [info@adaiclearinghouse.org](mailto:info@adaiclearinghouse.org).

**Your contact info and mailing address:**

YOUR NAME

AGENCY/COMPANY

[Do more online](#)   [Get help](#)   [Español](#)

- Follow up with communities to confirm findings
- Test messages around marijuana prevention & education
- Determine what is needed for regional education efforts
- Disseminate infosheet of results (\*\*Coming soon!\*\*)

Learn more & follow KC-YMPEP's work at [www.kingcounty.gov/health/marijuana](http://www.kingcounty.gov/health/marijuana)



# Discussion



# Contact information

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