

RRFSS Data Summary



Young Adults in Durham Region

Healthy living behaviours of
young adults ages 18 to 24
in Durham Region



September 2024

KEY FINDINGS

- Durham's young adults' overall measures of health and wellbeing are on a decreasing trend, with a concerning large decrease in self-rated mental health since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Durham's young adults' sense of belonging to their local community is declining.
- Alcohol is the most commonly consumed substance among young adults in Durham Region, followed by nicotine (vaping/e-cigarettes) and cannabis.
 - Almost 80% of young adults drink.
 - Almost half of young adults use cannabis or vape nicotine.
 - Prevalence of drinking and using cannabis or vaping nicotine is the highest among young adults compared to any other age group.
- Of the young adults who drink, one quarter consume alcohol in a way that puts them or others at moderate to increasing risk of alcohol-related harms and more than half reported at least one binge drinking episode within the past year.
- Vaping nicotine continues to be substantially more popular among young adults than smoking tobacco.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Durham's young adults' overall measures of health and wellbeing are on a downwards trend, with a large decrease in self-rated mental health.

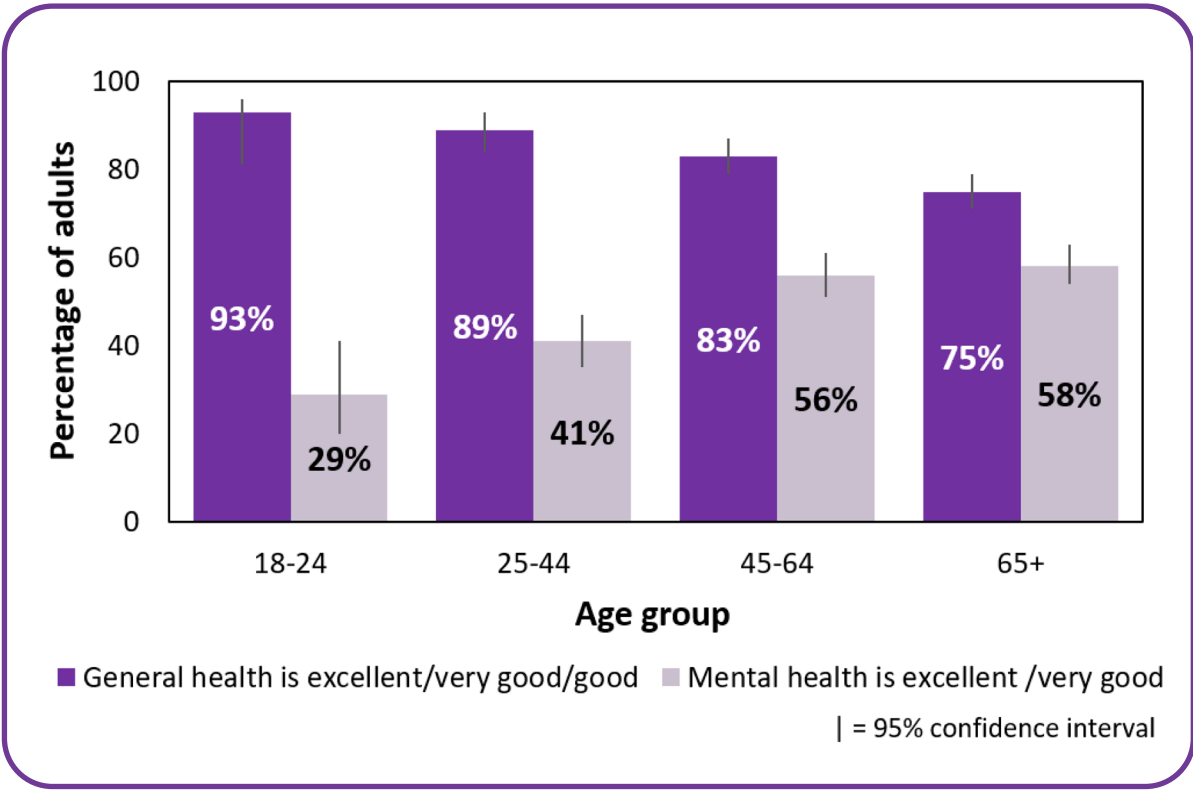
KEY STATISTICS:

- 53% of young adults (18-24 years) in Durham Region rate their general health as excellent or very good, continuing a long-term trend of slow decline (62% in 2021).¹
- 29% of young adults in Durham Region rate their mental health as excellent or good, representing a continuing concerning decrease from pre-pandemic data (41% in 2019).¹



¹**Data source:** Based on 2023 RRFSS survey data, the most recently available.

Figure 1: Self-rated general and mental health among Durham Region adults in 2023, by age group.



Data Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), Durham Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University, 2023.



TRENDS:

- Trends by age group are in opposite directions, with younger Durham residents reporting lower mental health and older residents reporting lower general health (Figure 1).
- Young adults' rate their mental health lower than older age groups.
- A significantly lower percentage of young adults' rate their mental health as excellent/very good compared to adults 45 years and older.

DRIVERS:

- Physical and mental health are strongly influenced by other factors of well-being, from financial stability and housing to social connection and community.
- Observed decreases in Durham residents' self-rated mental health, regardless of age, is in alignment with Canadian-wide trends that COVID-19 pandemic experiences have negatively impacted mental health.
- It is particularly concerning the decrease in young adults' mental health has continued on a negative trajectory in recent years as there was already an identified mental health crisis among this age group before the onset of the pandemic.²
- Extensive research now exists linking COVID-19 disruption to poorer mental health for young people.³ Findings suggest that the pandemic corresponded to increased mental health difficulties and decreased availability and access to services, simultaneously. It is likely we are still seeing the impacts of this on the mental health of young adults, and this may continue over the next few years.

²Ghandour *et al.* 2019. [Prevalence and treatment of depression, anxiety, and conduct problems in US children](#)

³Brown and Browne, 2024. [Youth mental health in a Canadian community sample during COVID-19: Exploring the role of perceived sense of belonging](#)

Durham's young adults' sense of belonging to their local community is declining.

KEY STATISTICS:

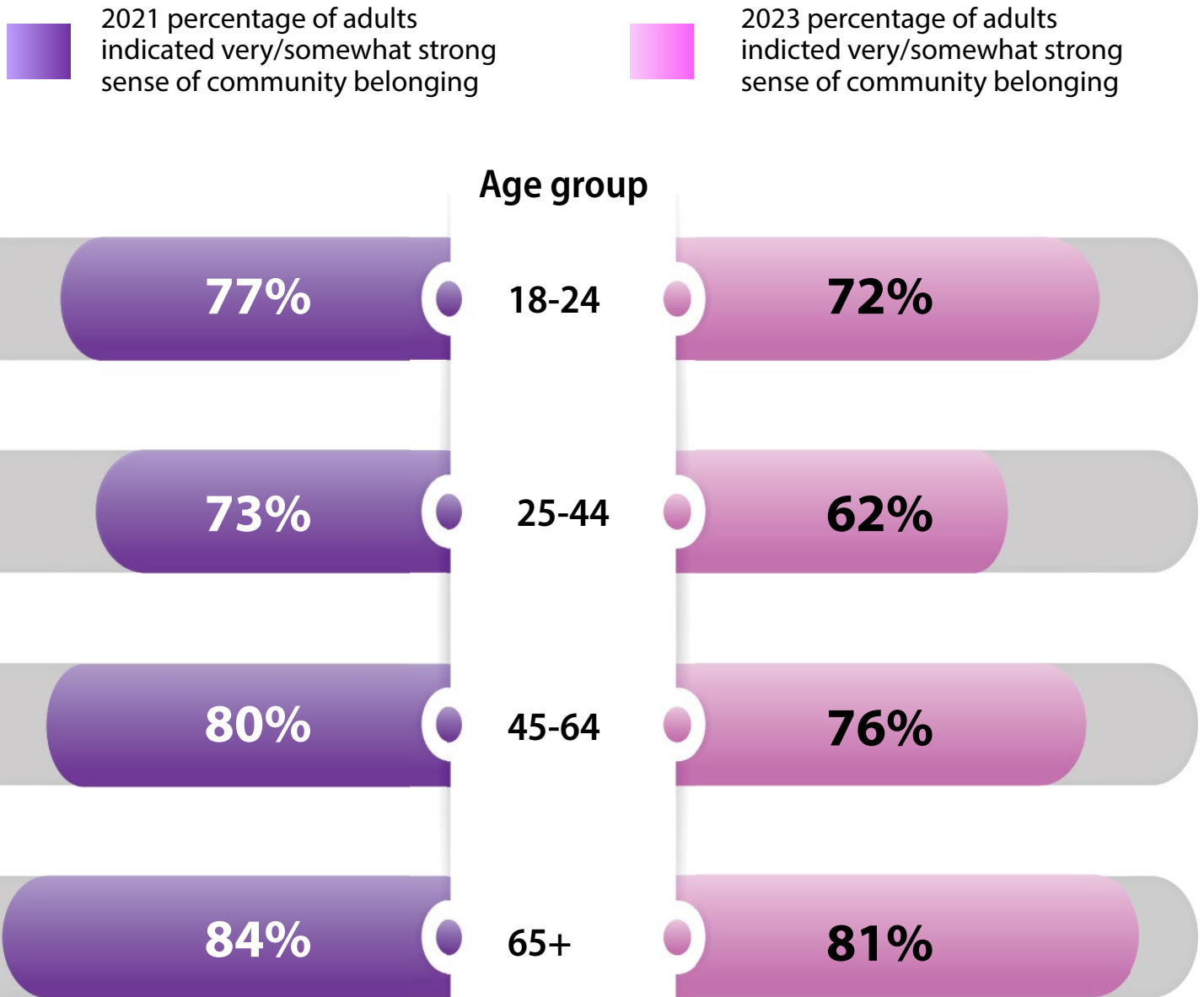
- 72% of young adults in Durham Region rated their sense of belonging to their local community⁴ as very or somewhat strong in 2023, continuing a long-term trend of slow decline (77% in 2021).⁵



⁴**Sense of belonging** relates to the level of social attachment one has to their community. This is shaped by four factors: (1) individuals have a feeling they are a member of a group (2) sense of mattering (3) feeling of integration and fulfillment of needs, and (4) a shared emotional connection. Definition is from Brown and Browne 2024. [Youth mental health in a Canadian community sample during COVID-19: Exploring the role of perceived sense of belonging.](#)

⁵**Data source:** Based on 2023 RRFSS survey data, the most recently available.

Figure 2: Self-rated sense of community belonging among Durham Region adults from in 2021 and 2023, by age group.



Data Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), Durham Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University, 2021, 2023.

TRENDS:

- Young adults (72%) have a weaker sense of community belonging than adults aged 45 to 64 (76%) and older adults aged 65+ (81%), but a stronger sense of belonging than adults aged 25 to 44 years (62%) (Figure 2). Although, these differences are notable, they are not statistically significant.⁶
- The slow decline in self-rated sense of community belonging among young adults is not exclusive to this age group, with all age groups experiencing reduced feelings of belonging, to varying degrees (Figure 2).

DRIVERS:

- Belonging is important to young adults as it mediates the relationship between their environment, any stressors they experience and psychological outcomes.⁷
- Sense of belonging is shaped by many factors, which can include positive family relationships, strong friendships, supportive relationships at school or work, and participating in events of social and cultural significance such as weddings, funerals, community festivals, and sporting events. Gender effects, race, economic resources and where a person lives also impacts sense of belonging.⁷⁻⁹
- The positive effect of belongingness increases with age, which is consistent with an investment decision over the lifecycle where individuals reap the benefits later in life.⁷
- Observed decreases in Durham young adults' sense of community belonging is in alignment with Canadian-wide trends that COVID-19 pandemic experiences have weakened feelings of community belonging.⁸
- Shock events, like the COVID-19 pandemic can uncover deficits in social cohesion and worsen existing social inequalities at the household to national levels.⁹
- Interpersonal relationships and connectedness we rely on for support during a crisis was dramatically reduced though distancing measures required to slow the spread of COVID-19, including events of social and cultural significance that help to build social cohesion and feelings of community belonging, like weddings, sporting events, and knowledge sharing conferences.⁷

⁶Although these differences are not statistically significant, they match trends noted in the literature which highlights an increasing sense of community belonging as individuals age. This increases our confidence that this trend represents a real difference among Durham adults.

⁷Brown and Browne, 2024. [Youth mental health in a Canadian community sample during COVID-19: Exploring the role of perceived sense of belonging.](#)

⁸Capaldi *et al.*, 2022. [Self-rated mental health, community belonging, life satisfaction and perceived change in mental health among adults during the second and third waves of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada.](#)

⁹Jewett *et al.*, 2021. [Social cohesion and community resilience during COVID-19 and pandemics: A rapid scoping review to inform the United Nations research roadmap for COVID-19 recovery.](#)

ALCOHOL, CANNABIS, AND TOBACCO USE

Alcohol is the most commonly used substance among Durham young adults.

KEY STATISTICS:

- 78% of young adults in Durham Region drink alcohol.¹⁰
- 49% of young adults in Durham Region use cannabis.¹¹
- Approximately 37% of young adults vape nicotine¹², whereas only 3% smoke cigarettes.¹³



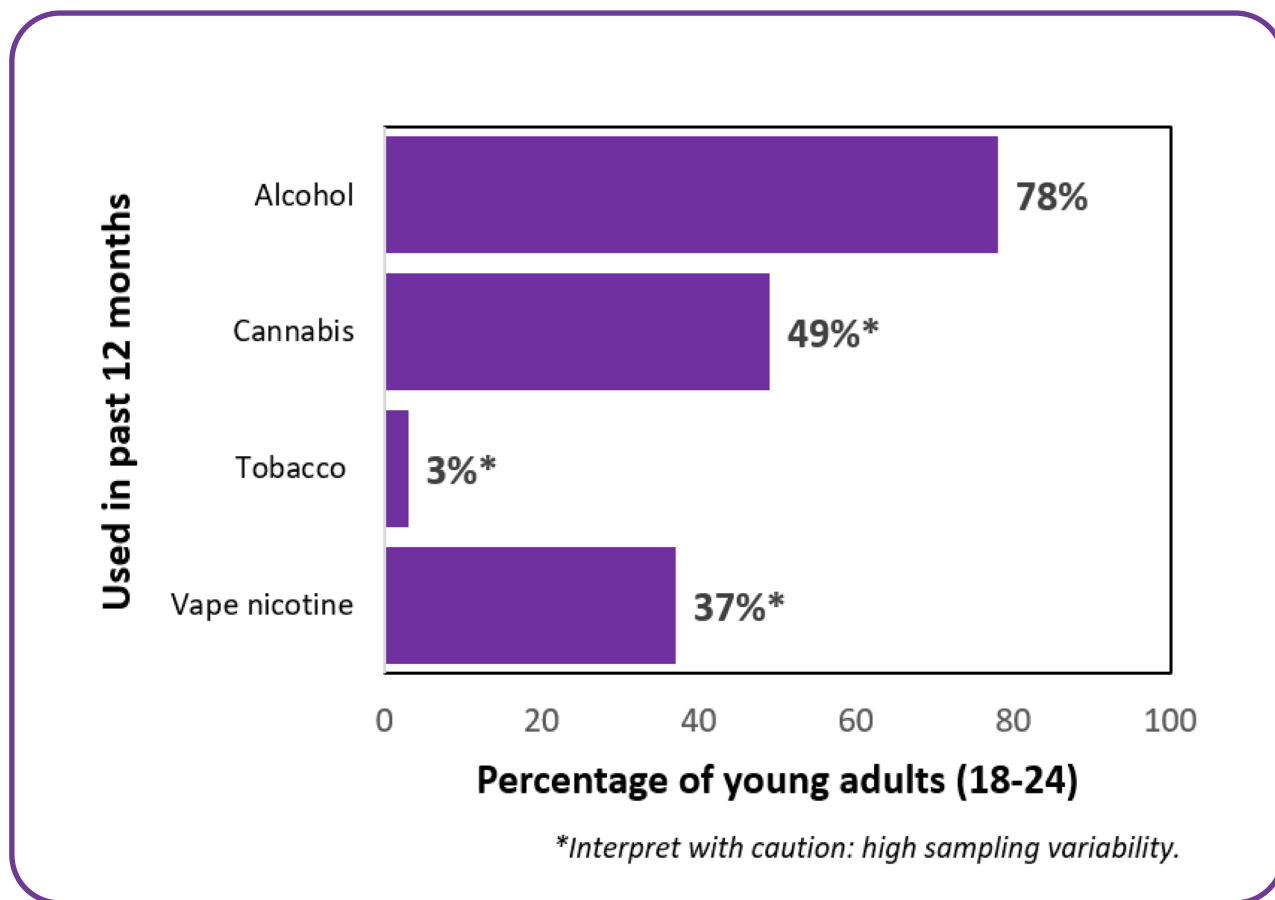
¹⁰**Data source:** Based on 2023 RRFSS survey data, the most recently available. It reflects the proportion of young adults who consumed at least one alcoholic beverage in the past 12 months.

¹¹**Data source:** Based on 2022 RRFSS survey data, the most recently available with an adequate sample size for analysis.

¹²**Data source:** Based on 2022 RRFSS survey data, the most recently available with an adequate sample size for analysis. It reflects the proportion of young adults who vaped at least once in the past 12 months.

¹³**Data source:** Based on 2023 RRFSS survey data, the most recently available. It reflects the proportion of young adults who self-identified as a current smoker.

Figure 3: Prevalence of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and nicotine use in the past year among young adults in Durham Region.



Note: the percentage of adults who vaped or used cannabis in the past year are approximations and were calculated based on weighted estimates from multiple RRFSS modules. Tobacco refers to smoking cigarettes and vaping refers to vaping nicotine.

Data Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), Durham Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University, Alcohol and Tobacco– 2023, Cannabis and Vape– 2022.

TRENDS:

- Of the substances RRFSS collects data on, alcohol is the most commonly consumed substance among Durham young adults followed by cannabis, and nicotine (vaping/e-cigarettes).
- Vaping nicotine continues to be substantially more popular among young adults than cigarette smoking.

DRIVERS:

- Alcohol is the most widely used and socially accepted substance in many cultures around the world, including Canada and Durham Region. Additionally, alcohol is the most common psychoactive substance used by youth and young adults.¹⁴
- Prevalence of alcohol consumption among Durham young adults is similar to the Canadian (76%) and Ontario (74%) averages.¹⁵
- In Canada, cannabis was legalized and regulated in 2018 and has remained the most used drug in Canada.¹⁵
- Cannabis use among Durham young adults is similar to Canadian averages.¹⁵
- Vaping continues to be prevalent among Durham young adults and much more common than smoking, which is in line with Canadian and provincial trends.

¹⁴Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health: Final Report, 2023.

¹⁵Estimates based on the 2019. Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CADS): summary of result for 2019 – the most recently available data

Many young adults in Durham Region consume alcohol in way that places themselves and others at increased risk of harm.

KEY STATISTICS:

- One quarter (24%) of Durham young adults consume alcohol in a way that puts them or others at moderate (13%) to increasing risk (11%) of alcohol-related harms.¹⁶
- More than half of the young adults who drink alcohol in Durham Region reported at least one binge drinking episode within the past year.¹⁷
- Young adults are more likely to binge drink (75%) at a bar, restaurant, or club than any other age group.¹⁷

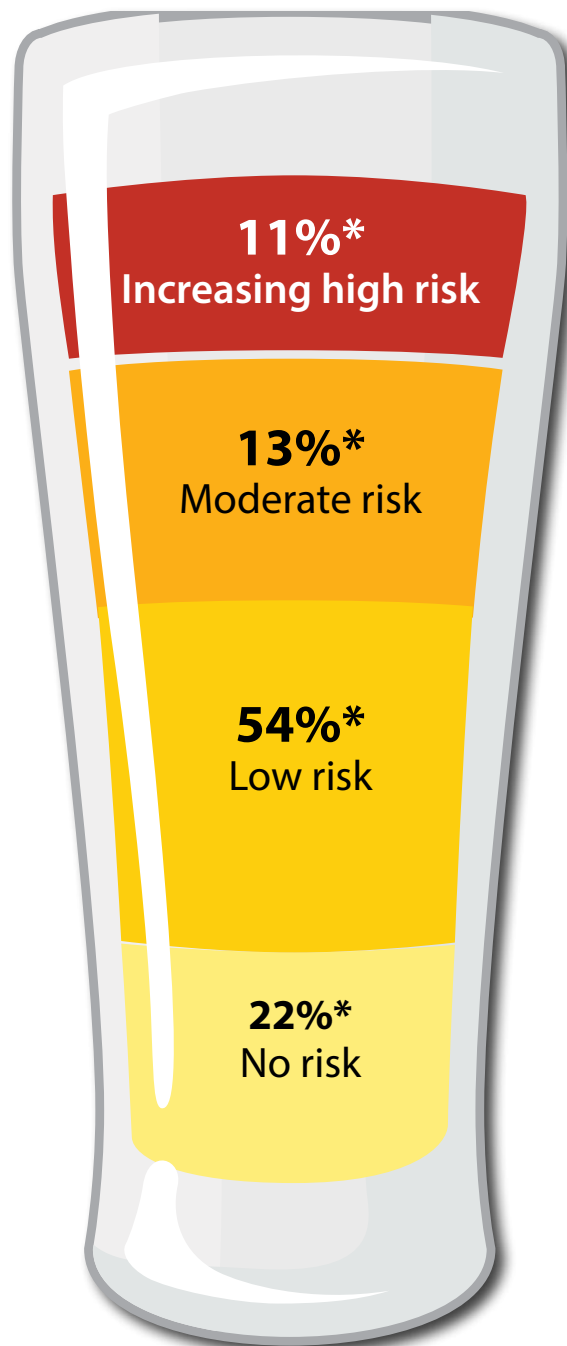


¹⁶**Data source:** RRFSS survey 2023 data – the most recent available. Risk levels is based on the guidelines set in the [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health: Final Report \(ccsa.ca\)](https://www.ccsa.ca)

¹⁷**Data source:** RRFSS survey 2022 data – the most recently available data.

Figure 4: Alcohol consumption risks among Durham Region young adults, based on the guidelines set in the Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health Report, 2023.

Alcohol consumption risk, percentage of young adults (18-24)



**Interpret with caution: high sampling variability.*

Data Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), Durham Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University, 2023.

TRENDS:

- The majority of Durham young adults consume alcohol in a way that poses either low (54%) or no (22%) risk of alcohol-related harms to themselves and others, based on the guidelines set in the [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health Report](#) (Figure 4).
- Alcohol consumption risk did not differ significantly among age groups.
- Time trend comparisons with the 2023 data are not available, due to small sample size of respondents in the 18 to 24 age group.
- 94% of Durham young adults correctly identified that the safe level of alcohol to drink during pregnancy is none at all.¹⁸
 - Awareness of the safe level of alcohol to drink during pregnancy did not vary significantly by age.

DRIVERS:

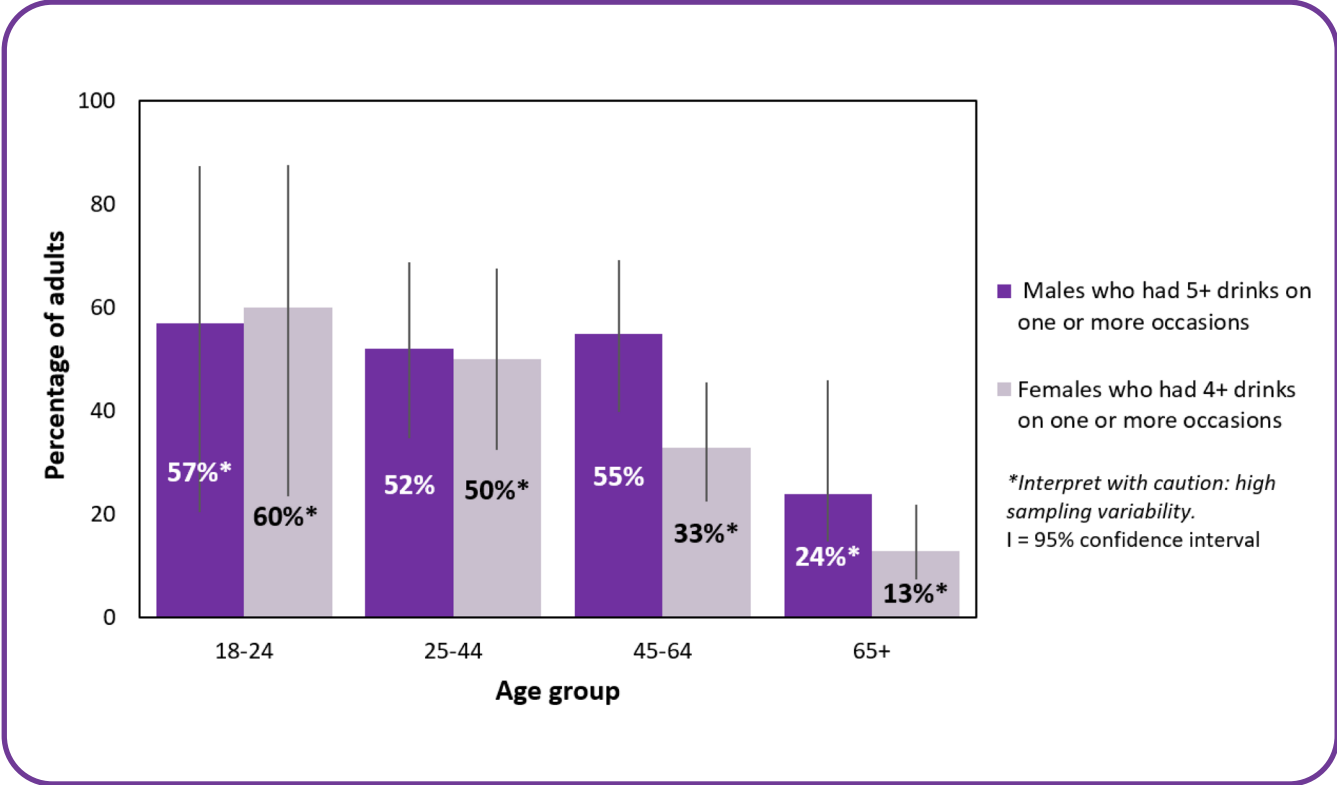
- Risk levels were defined based on the guidelines set in the [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health Report](#)¹⁹, as follows:
 - **No risk** – zero drinks in the past 12 months
 - **Low risk** – less than one to two drinks per week
 - **Moderate risk** – 3 to 6 drinks per week
 - **Increasingly high risk** – drinks every day OR drinks 7 or more drinks per week
- While alcohol use in Durham is common, young people are increasingly choosing not to drink or are “sober curious”, and 22% of young adults in Durham do not drink, which is in line with Canadian trends.²⁰

¹⁸**Data source:** RRFSS survey 2023 data – the most recent available.

¹⁹Risk levels of moderate or more are associated with increased risk of harms to self and others, including injuries and violence. Additionally, risk is associated with alcohol use per occasion, with the risk of negative outcomes increasing when consuming more than two standard drinks per occasion. [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health: Final Report, 2023 \(ccsa.ca\)](#).

²⁰[Reporting on alcohol use during pregnancy and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, 2023.](#)

Figure 5: Binge drinking behaviours among Durham Region adults, by gender and age group, 2022.



Data Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), Durham Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University, 2022.



TRENDS:

- Prevalence of binge drinking behaviour among young adults in Durham Region did not vary notably by gender.
 - Of those who drink alcohol, 57% of young adult males and 60% of young adult females reported at least one binge drinking episode within the past year, based on 2022 estimates (Figure 5).
- For both males and females, binge drinking behaviours were the most frequently reported by young adults and least frequently reported by older adults (65+) (Figure 5).
 - Declining trends in binge drinking behaviours by age group differed between males and females.
 - Among females, a consistent declining trend was observed, with stepwise decreases in the prevalence of binge drinking with increasing age. Additionally, binge drinking prevalence among young adult females was significantly higher compared to female older adults (65+).
 - Among males, binge drinking prevalence remains relatively steady around 52-57% for males ages 18 to 64, and then decreases sharply among older adults (65+). However, the difference in binge drinking prevalence among young adult males and older adult males was not statistically significant.

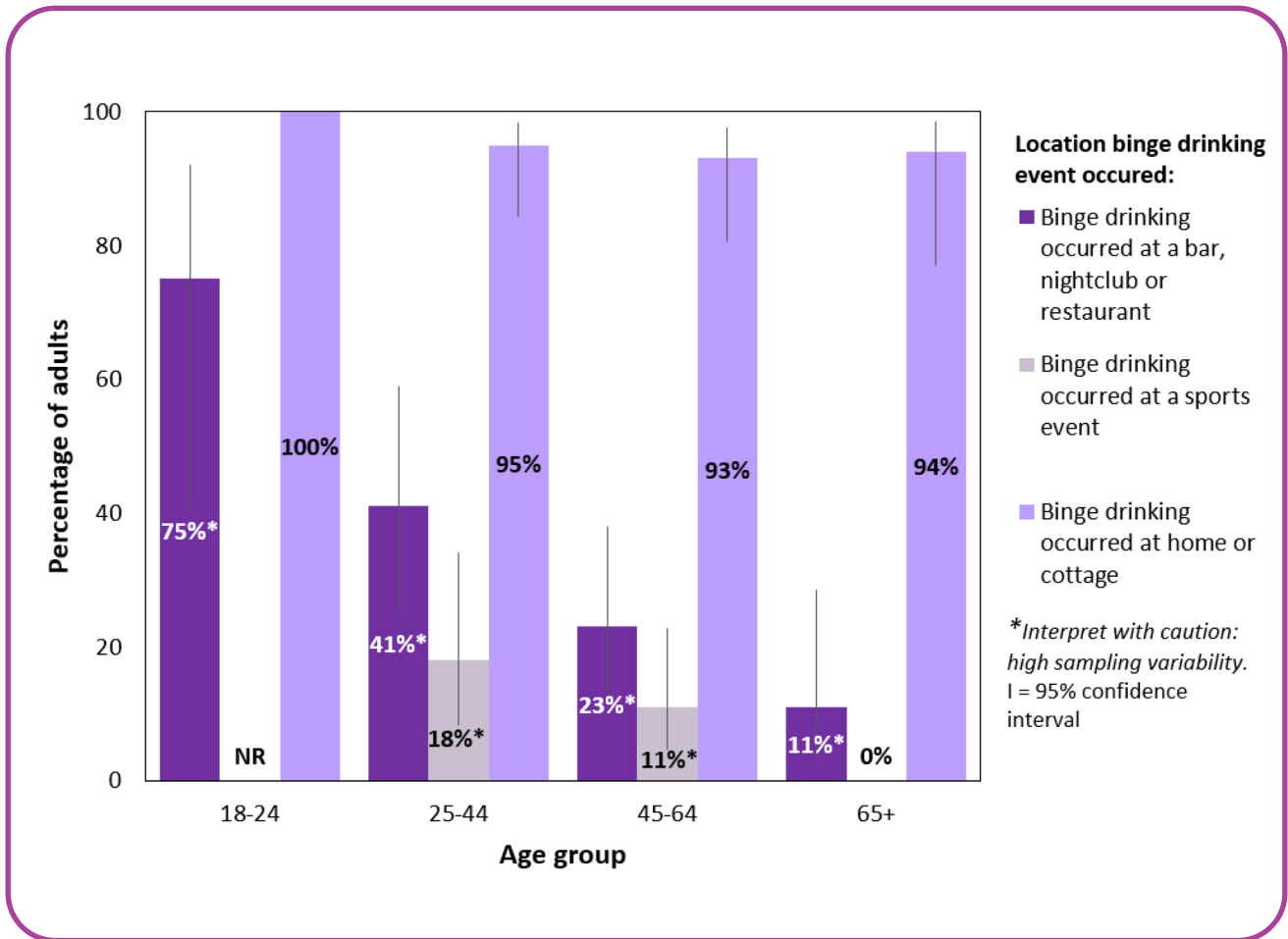
DRIVERS:

- Similar to what has been reported in the literature as well as recent national and provincial surveys, a high proportion of alcohol consumed by young adults in Durham Region is in the form of binge drinking.²¹ Binge drinking is also more common among young people.²²

²¹Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health Report, 2023

²²CAMH - Partying and Getting Drunk

Figure 6: Reported location of binge drinking episodes among Durham Region adults, by age group.



Note: the percentages for each age group total to greater than 100% because respondents could choose more than one response option.

Data Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), Durham Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University, 2022.

TRENDS:

- When adults who had reported binge drinking in the past year were asked where the binge drinking episode occurred, the two most frequently reported places across all age groups were at home/the cottage and at a bar/club/restaurant (Figure 6).
 - All young adults who had reported at least one binge drinking episode in the past year said that at least one of them occurred at home or at the cottage.
 - Reported binge drinking at a bar/club/restaurant shows a significant decline with increasing age (Figure 6).
- Sporting events and while participating in sports (data not shown – sample size too small) are not common locations for binge drinking among young adults in Durham Region.

DRIVERS:

- Alcohol consumption behaviours in young adults is linked to many complex interrelated factors. However, physical, and social opportunities have been shown to have the strongest influence on alcohol consumption, including binge drinking behaviours.²³ However, the impact of these factors on the decision to consume alcohol varies by circumstance, as the amount of alcohol an individual consumes at any one time is dependent in fluctuations in the decision-making process before, during, and/or after a drinking occasion.
- Additionally, the messages young adults receive about the potential negative effects of alcohol use can be clouded by media and advertisement portrayal of alcohol use, where it is seen as fun, something to do in social situations or as a means to relax.²⁴

²³Palmet *et al.*, 2024. [A review of factors influencing drinking behaviours in young Australian adults using a behavioural framework approach.](#)

²⁴Reporting on alcohol use during pregnancy and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, 2023

Cannabis remains the most used drug, not including alcohol, in Durham Region since its legalization in 2018 and is the most frequently used by young adults.

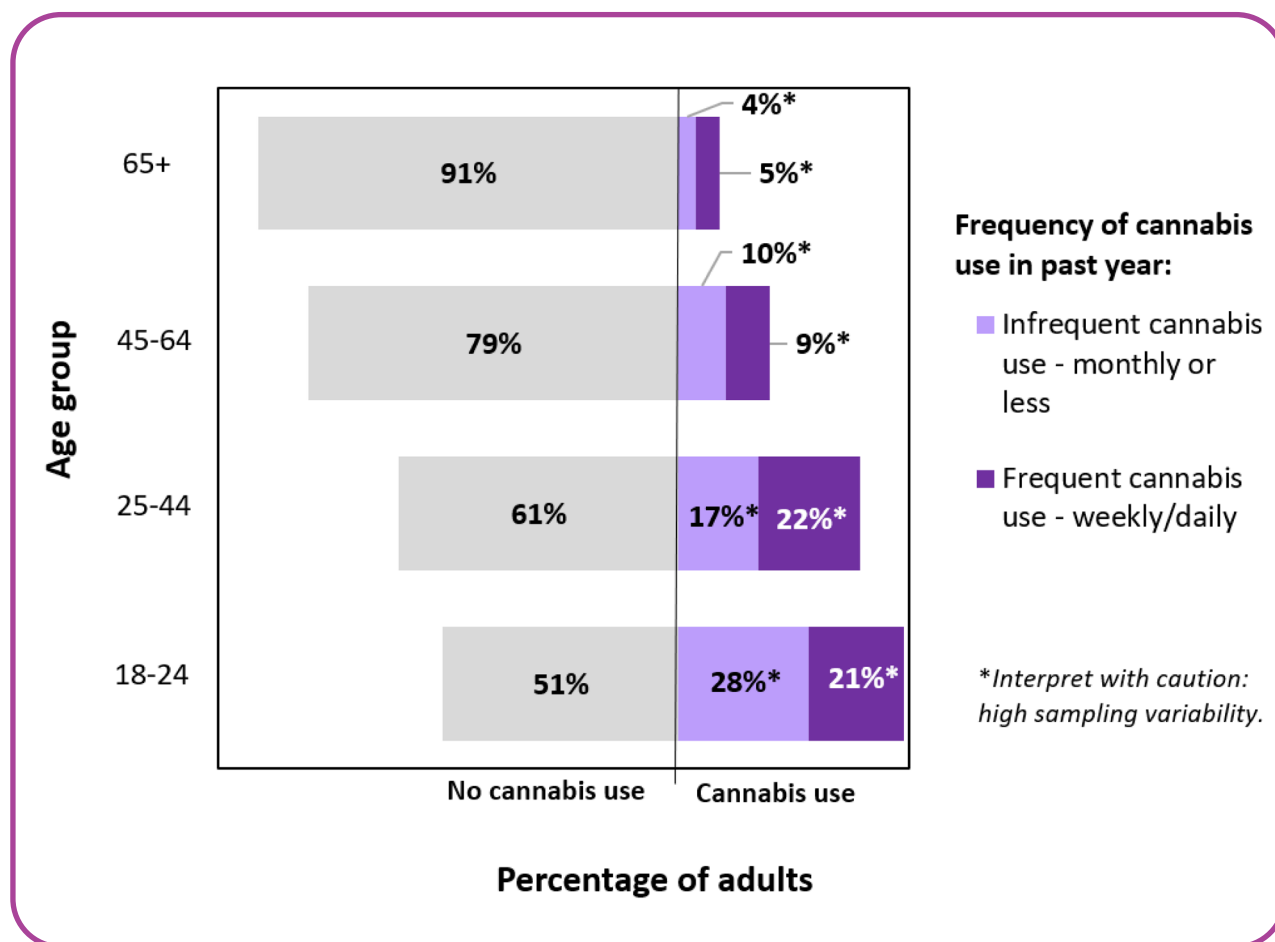
KEY STATISTICS:

- Cannabis is used more frequently by young adults in Durham Region than any other age group.
- Almost half (49%) of Durham Region young adults have used cannabis in the past year.²⁵
- Three quarters of young adults who use cannabis smoke it.²⁵
- The majority (83%) of young adults who use cannabis do so for recreational purposes.²⁵



²⁵**Data source:** Based on 2022 RRFSS survey data, the most recently available with an adequate sample size for analysis.

Figure 7: Prevalence of cannabis use among Durham Region adults, by age group.



Did not use cannabis includes people who have tried cannabis at least once in their lifetime but have not used cannabis in the past year as well as those who have never tried it.

Data Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), Durham Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University, 2022.

TRENDS:

- About half (51%) of young adults in Durham Region did not use cannabis in the past year (Figure 7).²⁵
- Infrequent cannabis use (less than once per week) is slightly more prevalent among young adults in Durham Region than frequent cannabis (weekly or daily) use (Figure 7).
- Prevalence of cannabis use shows a steep decline with increasing age with the highest prevalence among young adults (49%) and the lowest among older adults, 65+ (9%) (Figure 7).
- Cannabis use (daily, weekly, and less than monthly) was significantly more prevalent among younger adults compared to those 65 years and older.
- Cannabis use among young adults in Durham Region has declined slightly over the past few years from 52% in 2019 to 49% in 2022. Similarly, prevalence of frequent (weekly or daily) cannabis use among young adults has also declined, from 25% in 2019 to 21% in 2022.
 - Although the decline is not statistically significant, it is noteworthy that the decline is consistent across both indicators and may be worthwhile to monitor in the future.

DRIVERS:

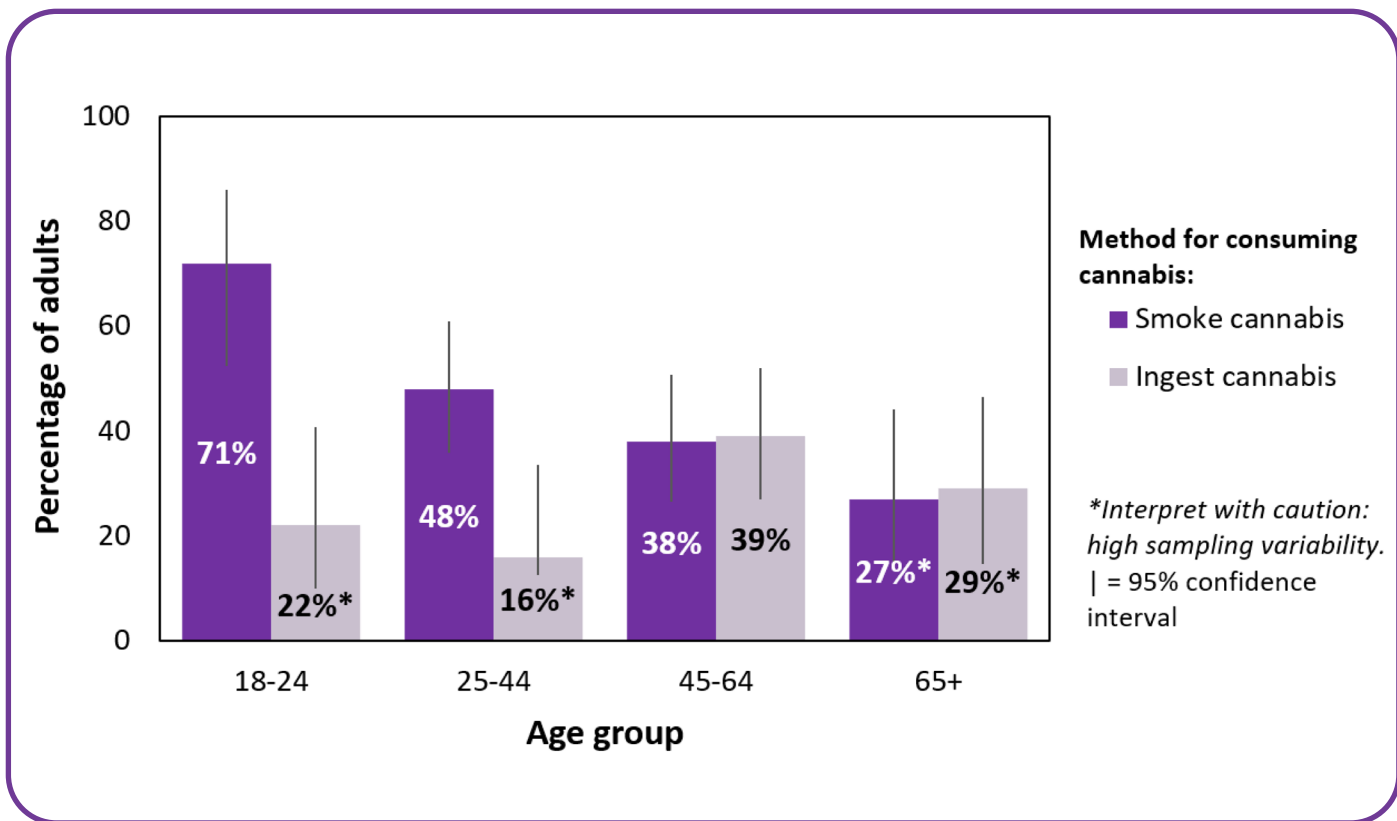
- In Canada, cannabis was legalized and regulated in 2018 and has remained the most used drug in Canada since then.²⁶
- Based on 2019 RRFSS data, 21% of young adults in Durham Region reported their cannabis use increased following legalization in 2018- the highest of all the age groups.²⁷ This may suggest that legalization and the resulting increased availability and access to cannabis and related products may be driving some of the cannabis use among young adults.
- Alongside legalization, cannabis is becoming more and more socially acceptable to use especially when compared to other drugs.²⁶
- There is also a common misconception among the general public that consuming cannabis is safe.
- Prevalence of cannabis use among Durham young adults is similar to Canadian estimates, which have also found cannabis consumption to be more prevalent among young adults (20-24) compared to adults above the age of 24.²⁶

²⁵**Data source:** Based on 2022 RRFSS survey data, the most recently available with an adequate sample size for analysis.

²⁶**Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CADS): summary of result for 2019.**

²⁷**Data source:** Based on 2019 RRFSS survey data.

Figure 8: Methods for consuming cannabis among Durham Region adults, by age group.



Data Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), Durham Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University, 2022.



TRENDS:

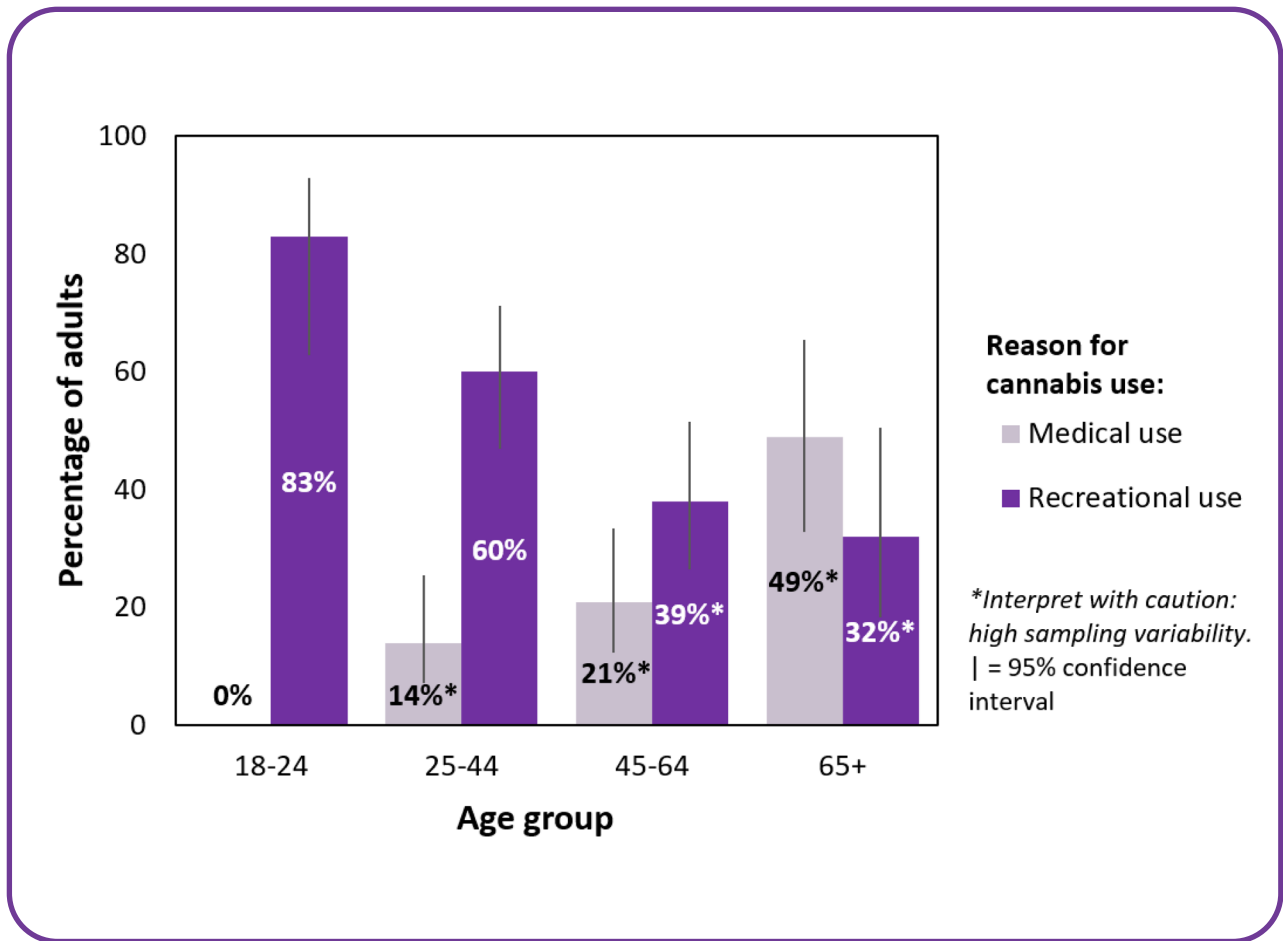
- Among young adults who use cannabis, almost three quarters (71%) smoke it, and almost one quarter (22%) ingest it (Figure 8).
- Method of use differs significantly by age group, with trends by age group in opposite directions (Figure 8). Younger Durham residents report smoking cannabis more frequently whereas older residents report ingesting cannabis more frequently.
 - Young adults consume cannabis through smoking it significantly more frequently than older age groups (45+).
 - There were no significant differences among age groups with regards to ingesting cannabis.

DRIVERS:

- In the literature, the most prevalent reasons for cannabis use among young adults are to experiment, to fit in, to feel good, or to feel better.²⁸
- Affordability of cannabis makes it appealing to younger people who have limited economic resources in which to purchase it. Other drugs like cocaine and ecstasy are much more expensive.²⁸

²⁸Patrick *et al.*, 2016. [Reasons for marijuana use among young adults and long-term associations with marijuana use and problems.](#)

Figure 9: Prevalence of cannabis use for strictly medical or recreational purposes among Durham Region adults, by age group.



Data Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), Durham Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University, 2022.

TRENDS:

- The majority (83%) of young adults who use cannabis reported doing so for purely recreational purposes (Figure 9).
- During the 2022 RRFSS survey, there were no young adults who reported using cannabis for strictly medical purposes.
- The purpose for using cannabis differs dramatically by age group. Trends by age group are in opposite directions with the highest prevalence of recreational use reported by young adults and the highest prevalence of medical use reported by adults 65 and older (Figure 9).
 - Reported recreational cannabis use was significantly higher among young adults compared to adults aged 45 years and older.

DRIVERS:

- The difference observed in the preferred method of consuming cannabis among age groups may be related to the primary reason for using it. For example, smoking a joint can be a more social activity among young adults compared to ingesting it.²⁹ Whereas, older adults who use cannabis for medical purposes are less likely to consume it via smoking, with many of them using cannabidiol-only products via lotions and tinctures.³⁰

²⁹Why is cannabis use so prevalent in young communities.

³⁰Yang *et al.*, 2022. Cannabis: an emerging treatment for common symptoms in older adults

Vaping nicotine is much more prevalent than smoking tobacco among young adults.

KEY STATISTICS:

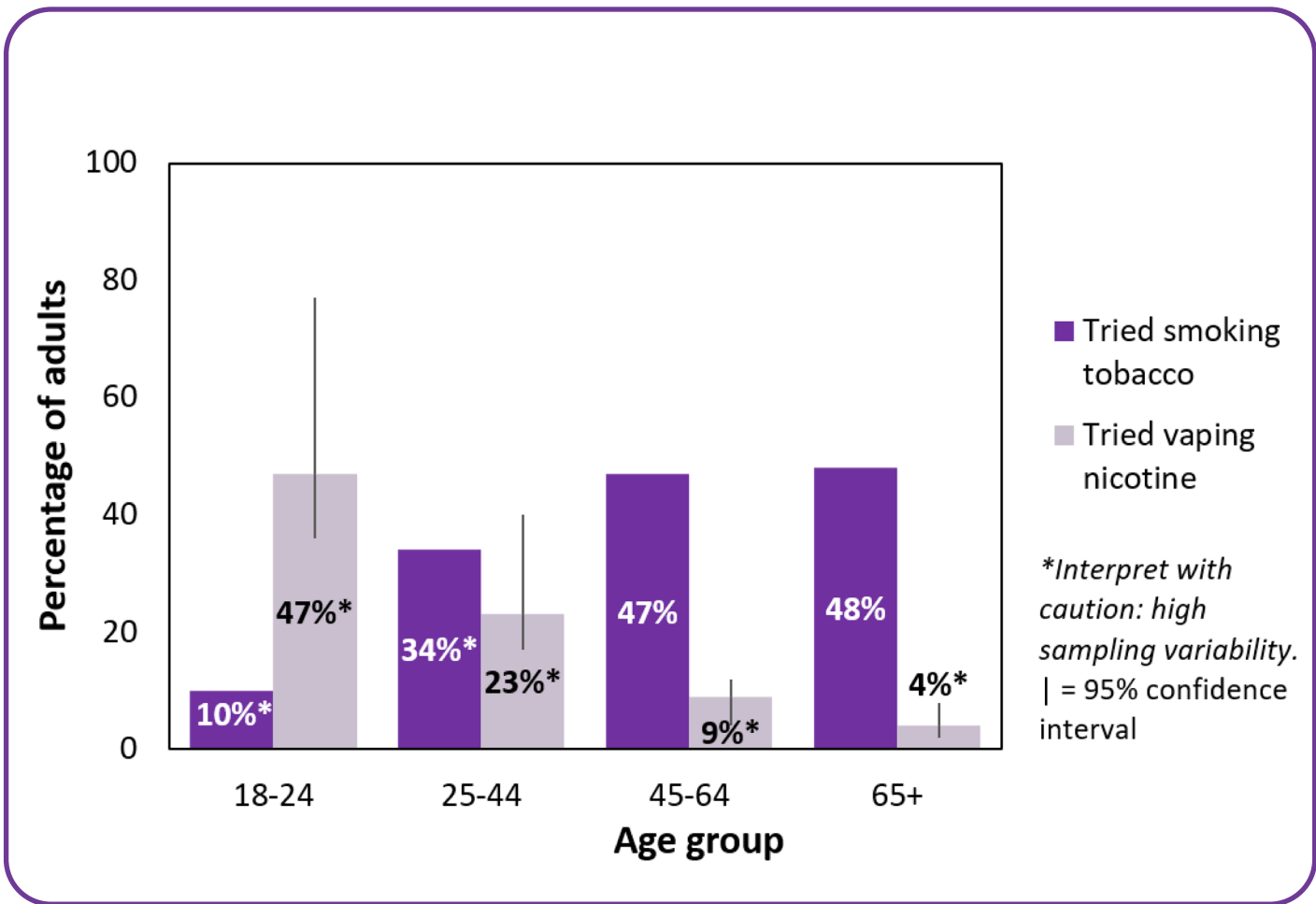
- Almost half of young adults in Durham Region have tried vaping nicotine.
- Vaping nicotine is much more prevalent³¹ than smoking tobacco among young adults in Durham Region.³²
- Vaping nicotine continues to be prevalent among young adults even though 80% think that when people use e-cigarettes, they are putting their health at high risk of negative outcomes.³²
- Peer pressure is the most common reason young adults in Durham Region reported that they vape nicotine.³¹



³¹**Data source:** Based on 2022 RRFSS survey data, the most recently available with an adequate sample size for analysis.

³²**Data source:** Based on 2023 RRFSS survey data, the most recently available.

Figure 10: Prevalence of smoking and vaping among Durham Region adults, by age group.



Note: Percentage who have ever tried smoking is an estimate and based on adding the weighted estimates for current and former smokers together. 95% confidence intervals are not provided for these estimates.

Data Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), Durham Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University, Smoking - 2023, Vaping - 2022.

TRENDS:

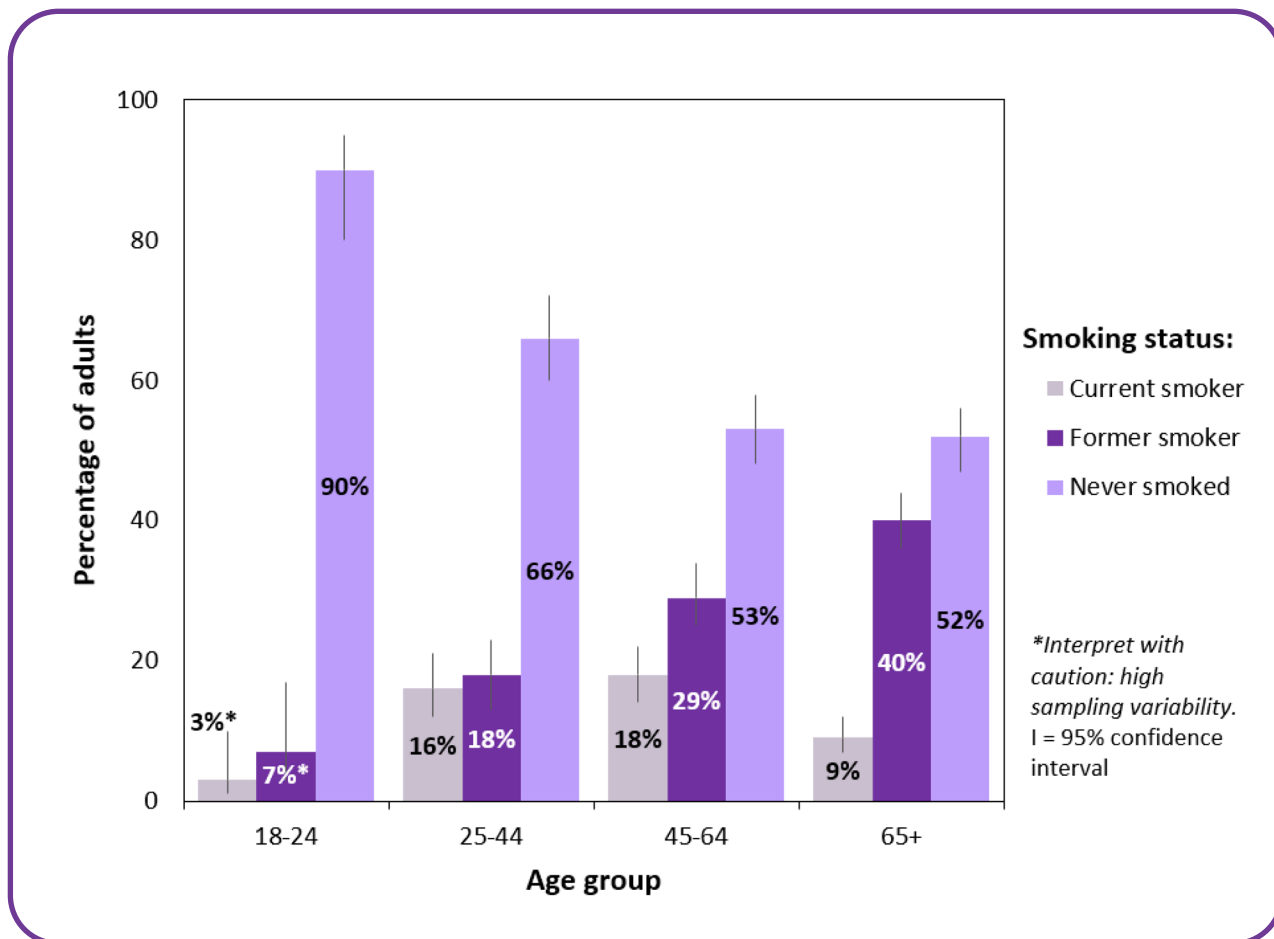
- Young adults in Durham Region are much more likely to try vaping than smoking.
- Almost half of young adults have tried vaping at least once compared to approximately 10% trying smoking at least once (Figure 10).
- Trends by age group are in opposite directions, with younger Durham Residents more likely to have tried vaping and older residents more likely to have tried smoking in their lifetime (Figure 10).
 - Young adults are significantly more likely to have tried vaping compared to adults 45 years and older.

DRIVERS:

- In line with provincial and national trends vaping continues to be prevalent among young adults in Durham Region and young adults are more likely to have tried vaping while older adults more likely to have tried smoking.³³

³³Statistics Canada: [Canadian Tobacco and Nicotine Survey, 2022](#).

Figure 11: Current smoking status among adults in Durham Region, by age group.



Data Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), Durham Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University, 2023.

TRENDS:

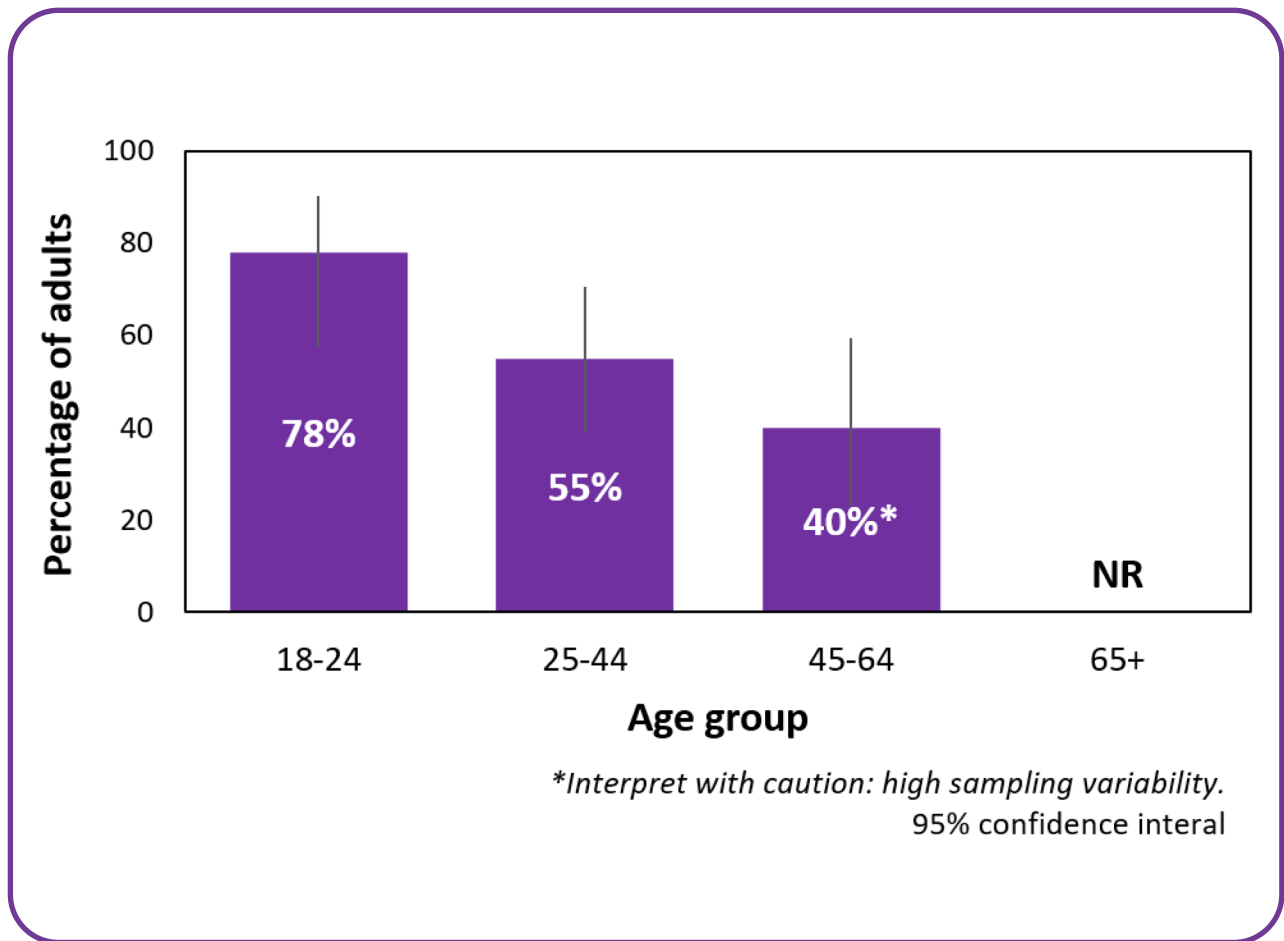
- Approximately 10% of young adults in Durham Region have ever tried smoking, and 3% are current smokers (Figure 11).
- Current and former smoking prevalence (i.e., smoked any cigarettes within the past 12 months) is significantly lower among young adults compared to adults 45 years and older (Figure 11).

DRIVERS:

- Smoking rates among Canadian teens and young adults have been in steady decline since the early 2000s.³⁴

³⁴Statistics Canada: [Canadian Tobacco and Nicotine Survey, 2022](#).

Figure 12: Prevalence of vaping/e-cigarette use in the past year among Durham Region adults, by age group.



Data Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), Durham Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University, 2022.

TRENDS:

- Of the 47% of young adults who reported they have ever tried vaping, more than three quarters (78%) of them actively vaped within the past year.
- There is a declining trend in the proportion of adults who currently vape with the highest proportion observed for young adults and the lowest proportion among adults age 45 and older (Figure 12). However, there were no significant differences identified between the age groups.
- Of Durham young adults who vape, the most frequently reported reason they use e-cigarettes was because of peer pressure (26%) and because of curiosity/ experimentation or because they like it (23%).³⁵
- This is different than older age groups, 25 and older, where the most common reason for vaping is for harm reduction, to either help cut back, quit, replace long term cigarette use or because they believe it is safer than smoking.^{35,36}
- The sample size for this module was too small to determine if these differences among age groups is statistically significant or not.

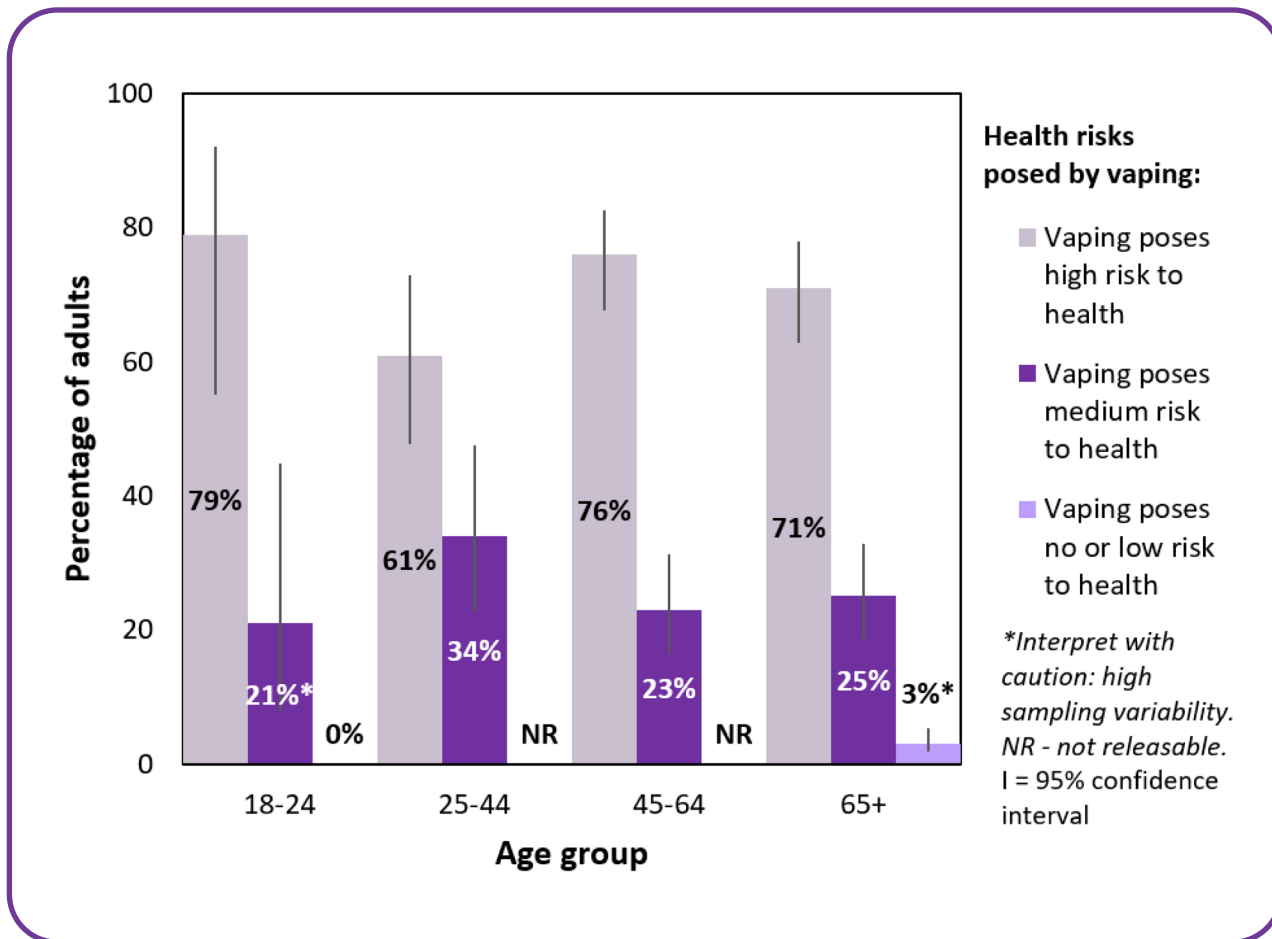
DRIVERS:

- Although the awareness of the health risks of vaping among young adults is high, prevalence of vaping among young adults is also very high.
- Young adults are more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviours than older adults since the brain is still developing and maturing in the young adult years. As a result, teens and young adults are often more impulsive, more likely to take risks, and less likely to consider the consequences. This may be one of many factors influencing the high prevalence of vaping among young adults even when the awareness of the health risks is just as high.
- The main reason for vaping varies substantially between young adults and older age groups. Social influence or peer pressure is the most common reason for vaping among young adults, whereas harm reduction of smoking behaviours (e.g., cut back, replace, quit) is the most common reason for vaping among adults aged 35 years and older. This trend may also reflect the lower smoking prevalence in young adults, compared to the higher prevalence among older adults.

³⁵**Data source:** Based on 2022 RRFSS survey data, the most recently available.

³⁶Estimates not shown due to small sample sizes.

Figure 13: Awareness of health risks associated with vaping among Durham Region adults, by age group.



Data Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), Durham Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University, 2023.

TRENDS:

- Generally, awareness of the health risks of vaping is strong among young adults (Figure 13). When asked if in general when people use e-cigarettes do you think they are putting their health at risk, 79% of young adults stated that it was a high risk, 21% reported a medium risk, and no young adults stated that there was no/low risk.³⁷
- Young adults had the greatest proportion of those who said vaping was a high risk to their health compared to the other age groups, however, this difference was not statistically significant.³⁷

DRIVERS:

- Health Canada public opinion research with youth highlight that the most common reasons youth vape are to reduce stress, because they enjoyed it, curiosity, and desire to fit in, peer pressure or social influence.³⁸ Excluding stress reduction, Durham RRFSS data is in line with these trends.
- Social sources like friends and family have been shown to be the primary source of where young adults obtain vaping devices and liquids, rather than retail sources, which may increase the impact of social influence.³⁹
- Social influence – risky behaviours can sometimes be a way to gain social approval or acceptance. Peer pressure for example, can play a significant role in risk taking behaviours.⁴⁰ If someone sees their friends or peers doing risky things and wants to feel accepted by them, they may engage in those behaviours too. This is particularly true during late adolescence when teens and young adults typically feel that conforming to their social group is important.⁴¹ Pressures to conform may override or be in contradiction to any personal knowledge or beliefs they have about risks.

³⁸Health Canada: [Preventing kids and teens from smoking and vaping](#).

³⁹Health Canada: [Canadian Tobacco and Nicotine Survey \(CTNS\): Summary of results for 2021](#).

⁴⁰Siraj R, Najam B, Ghazal S. Sensation seeking, peer influence, and risk-taking behavior in adolescents. *Educ Res Int*. 2021;8:1-8. doi:10.1155/2021/8403024

⁴¹Duell N, Steinberg L, Icenogle G, *et al.*, Age patterns in risk taking across the world. *J Youth Adolesc*. 2018;47:1052-1072. doi:10.1007/s10964-017-0752-y

DATA SOURCE

The Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS) telephone survey is the best available source of information on the attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours among young adults in Durham Region.

All data presented in this report were collected through RRFSS– a telephone survey of Durham Region adults (18 years and older). Estimates are based on the 2023 survey cycle, the most recently available, unless otherwise noted. For example, although 2023 data were available for cannabis use and vaping, data from the 2022 cycle was used instead as it had a much larger sample size.

Assessing statistical significance

In this report “statistically or significantly different” means that the 95% confidence intervals of the two estimates being compared did not overlap.

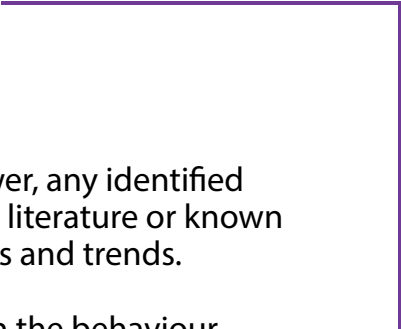
A note on sample size

In general, the young adult (18-24 years) age group has the lowest response rate for RRFSS of all the age groups. This results in a much smaller sample size and number of responses to analyze for this age category.

This directly impacts analysis in two ways:

- Reduces the precision of the estimate (i.e., produces large confidence intervals).
 - In other words, we are less certain that the estimate accurately reflects what the true value estimate of the population would be. The larger the confidence interval of an estimate, the more cautious we should be when using or interpreting the estimate.
- Reduces statistical power when comparing the estimates among age groups.
 - This means that when we compare estimates for the 18-24 age group and other age groups, we may not find a statistically significant difference, even if a true difference exists.

⁴²RRFSS is asked for three cycles (Jan-Apr, May-Aug, Sep-Dec) each year. In 2023, vaping, smoking and cannabis use questions were only asked for one cycle whereas it was asked for all three cycles in 2022. For these modules, having data from only one cycle does not result in a large enough sample size to be able to report on data for the young adult (18-24) population, or make comparisons among age groups.



Although the smaller sample size impacts statistical precision and power, any identified general trends can be compared with trends identified in the scientific literature or known anecdotally which can help us improve our confidence in the estimates and trends.

All things considered, RRFSS remains our best source of information on the behaviour, knowledge, attitudes, and practices among young adults in Durham Region.