

## Canada Renews its Drug Strategy

In an effort to reduce the supply and demand for drugs the Ministry of Health and Justice and the Attorney General of Canada, together with the provinces and territories, have announced a new approach to addressing the root causes of substance abuse in Canadian society.

The new drug strategy includes committing \$245 million over the next five years. These funds are to be invested in community based prevention, health promotion and treatment issues; public education

campaigns; research; a biennial national conference; proposed legislative reforms on marijuana; and new resources to help decrease the supply of illicit drugs.

The proposed cannabis legislative reforms provide alternative penalties against possession of small amounts of cannabis and create tougher penalties for those growing and distributing the drug. New penalties will be tailored to fit the crime and focus on discouraging the production and use of marijuana. Reforms to replace

current criminal court processes with alternative penalties for possession of 15 grams or less of marijuana; provide tougher penalties for illegal growers; and provide law enforcement officers with the discretion to issue a ticket or summons to court for possession of more than 15 grams and up to 30 grams are some examples of proposed legislative changes. The Government of Canada is committed to reporting the progress and direction of the Strategy to Parliament every two years.

## Older Adolescents Remain Optimistic Despite Challenges

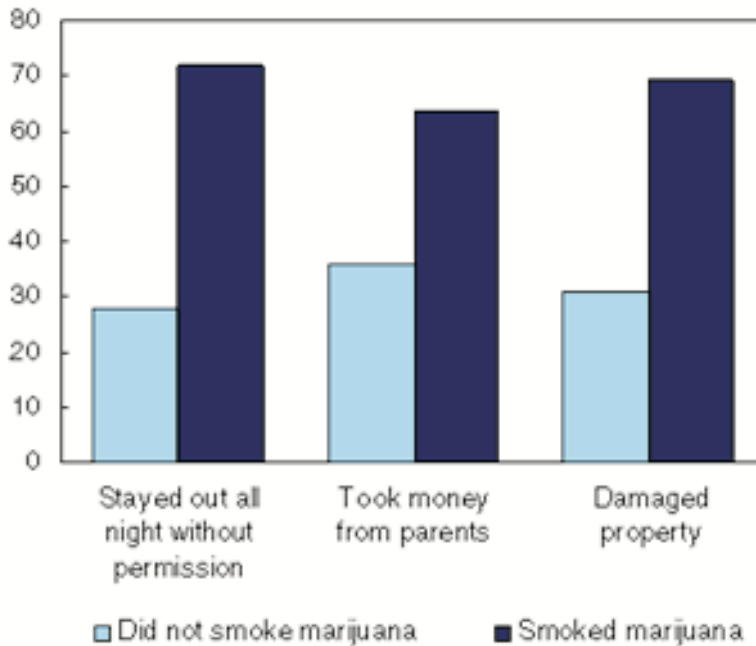
Self-report data from the fourth cycle of the Canadian National Longitudinal survey of Children and Youth indicates that despite an increase in selected risky behaviors and depressive symptoms, most youth remain optimistic about the future.

Approximately 95% of youth aged 16 and 17 appeared to have a healthy and optimistic outlook on the future with 88% of adolescents reporting that they would like to continue their education past secondary or high school. (The number of young adults aged 20-24 who had continued on to University was actually closer to 30% according to the 2001 census).

With age, more youth also reported symptoms of depression; 24% of 16 and 17 year olds reported symptoms of depression compared with the 9% reporting these

**Marijuana use higher among youth who engage in risky behaviours**

% reporting marijuana use



symptoms at age 12 and 13. Feelings of anxiety and distress were found to increase in late adolescence as well.

Certain risky behaviors increased in older adolescents such as staying out all night and taking money from parents without permission. Fighting that resulted in physical injury also increased between the ages of 12 and 17. Such risky behaviors are associated with the use of marijuana. Approximately 44% of adolescents reported using marijuana in the last 12 months, and those who had reported engaging in staying out all night, taking money from parents, and damaging property had a much higher incidence of use (1.8 to 2.6 times higher).