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Survey of WA shows support for cannabis up

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West Australians have become more tolerant of cannabis, with one in five saying occasional or regular use is acceptable, a new survey reveals.

Experts say the results might reflect a mellowing of attitudes about cannabis overall, even among parents and the middle-aged, after the synthetic cannabis Kronic was banned by the State Government in June, the same time the survey was held.

It comes as tough new WA laws on possessing cannabis come into effect from today.

Anyone caught with more than 10 grams of cannabis now faces two years jail and a \$2000 fine.

The survey, by Painted Dog Research for health insurer HBF and *The West Australian*, showed people were far more accepting of cannabis than in the previous four years.

The telephone poll of more than 600 adults across all age groups found the number of people who believed cannabis was "never acceptable" had fallen markedly in only a year, from 89 per cent last year to 69 per cent this year.

The increases in acceptance included people aged 25 to 64 and those with children, and men were

twice as likely as women to tolerate people smoking cannabis.

Similarly, there was a fall in the number of people who said it was never acceptable to smoke any type of cigarette – down from 81 per cent last year to 56 per cent.

While almost 80 per cent of people supported graphic warnings on cigarettes, only about half supported plain packaging and thought it would reduce smoking rates in WA.

The cannabis findings echo those of a recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, which found 13.4 per cent of West Australians aged 14 and over had recently used the drug — 30 per cent higher than the national average.

The data, based on the 2010 national drug strategy household survey, also showed fewer people saw cannabis as a seriously harmful drug.

National Drug Research Institute senior researcher Steve Allsop said the results of both surveys showed the community needed to help people become more aware of the broad range of risks from cannabis, including mental health, physical health and education.

Public Health Association

president Mike Daube said tobacco companies also needed to be more closely regulated, having spent at least \$20 million in the past year on campaigns opposing tobacco controls.

