



Say no to pain – Research into attitudes towards medicinal cannabis in the UK



June 2023

Releaf[®]



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Introduction

With many questions still being asked by society about cannabis and its therapeutic potential, Releaf set out to uncover the attitudes, interest and concerns people feel towards medicinal cannabis in the UK today.

This research sought to identify the prevalence of people in the UK who have health conditions that could mean they are eligible for medicinal cannabis, while also identifying how many people have used cannabis, both via prescription and illicit, street cannabis, for non-recreational use.

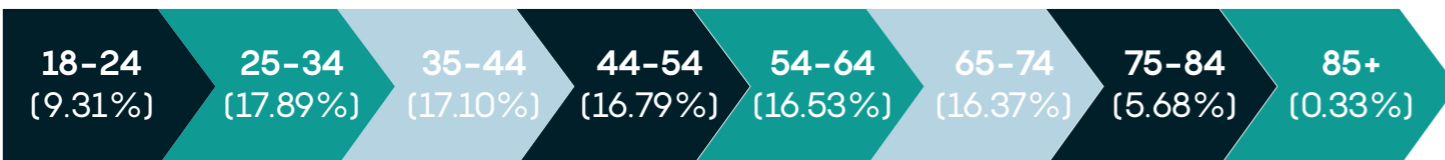
Methodology

Releaf conducted an online survey on 15th April 2023. A nationally representative sample of:

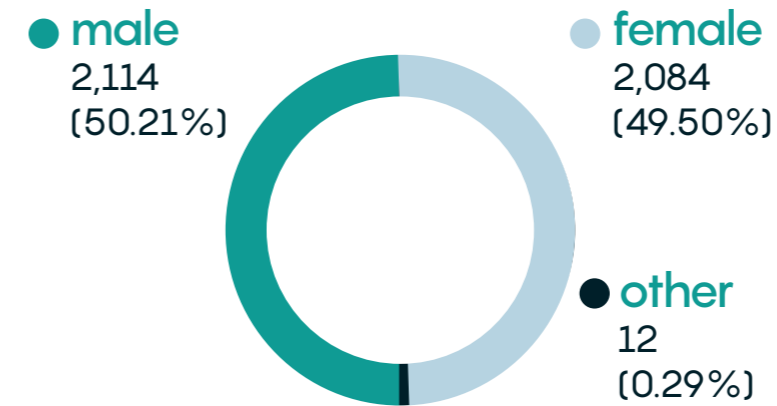
4,210

UK adults were polled.

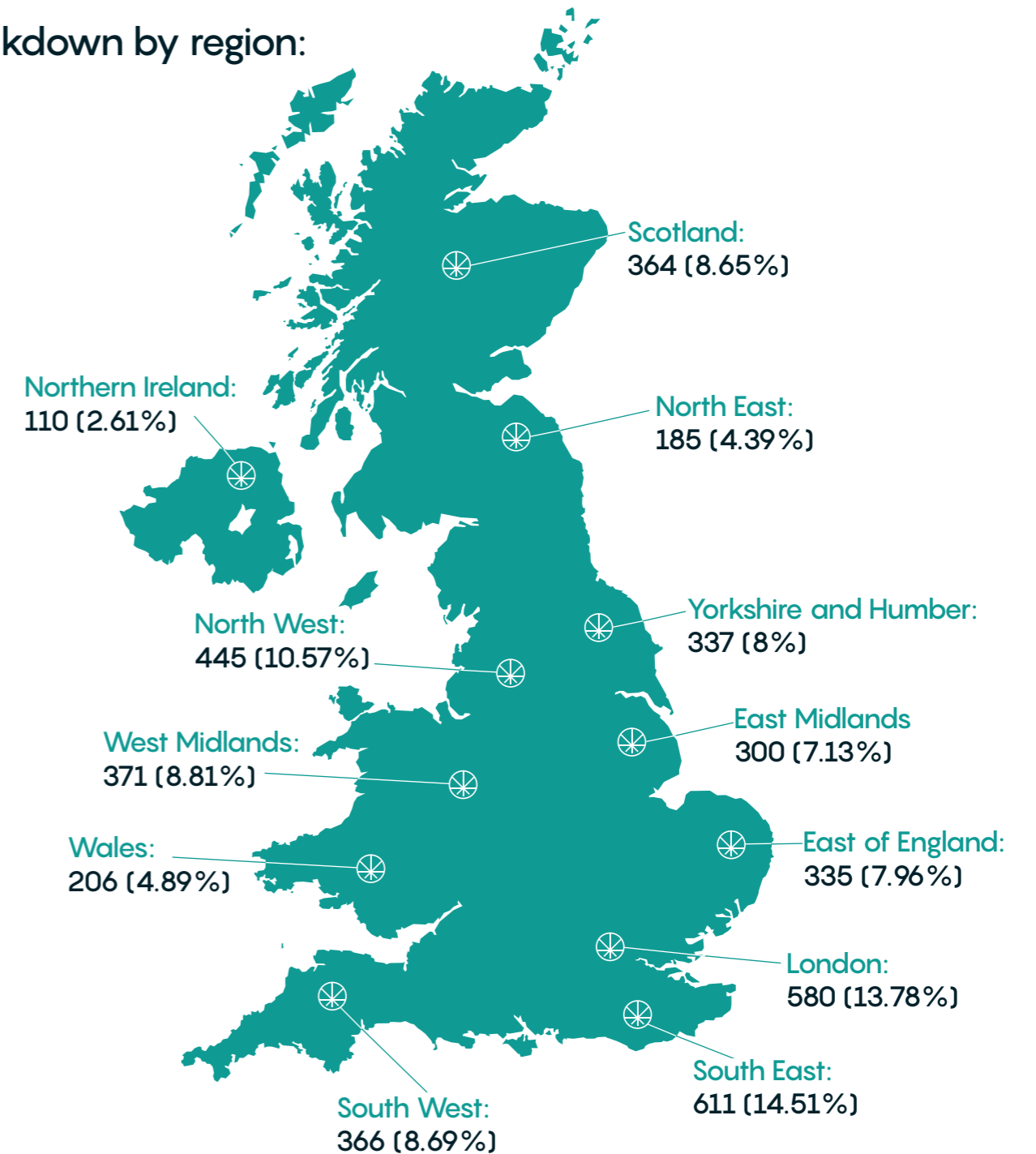
The age breakdown of the sample was as follows:



Breakdown by gender:



Breakdown by region:



About Releaf

Releaf is the UK's first all-in-one medicinal cannabis e-clinic, offering a wholly online service that simplifies the way in which patients acquire, consume and benefit from medicinal cannabis.

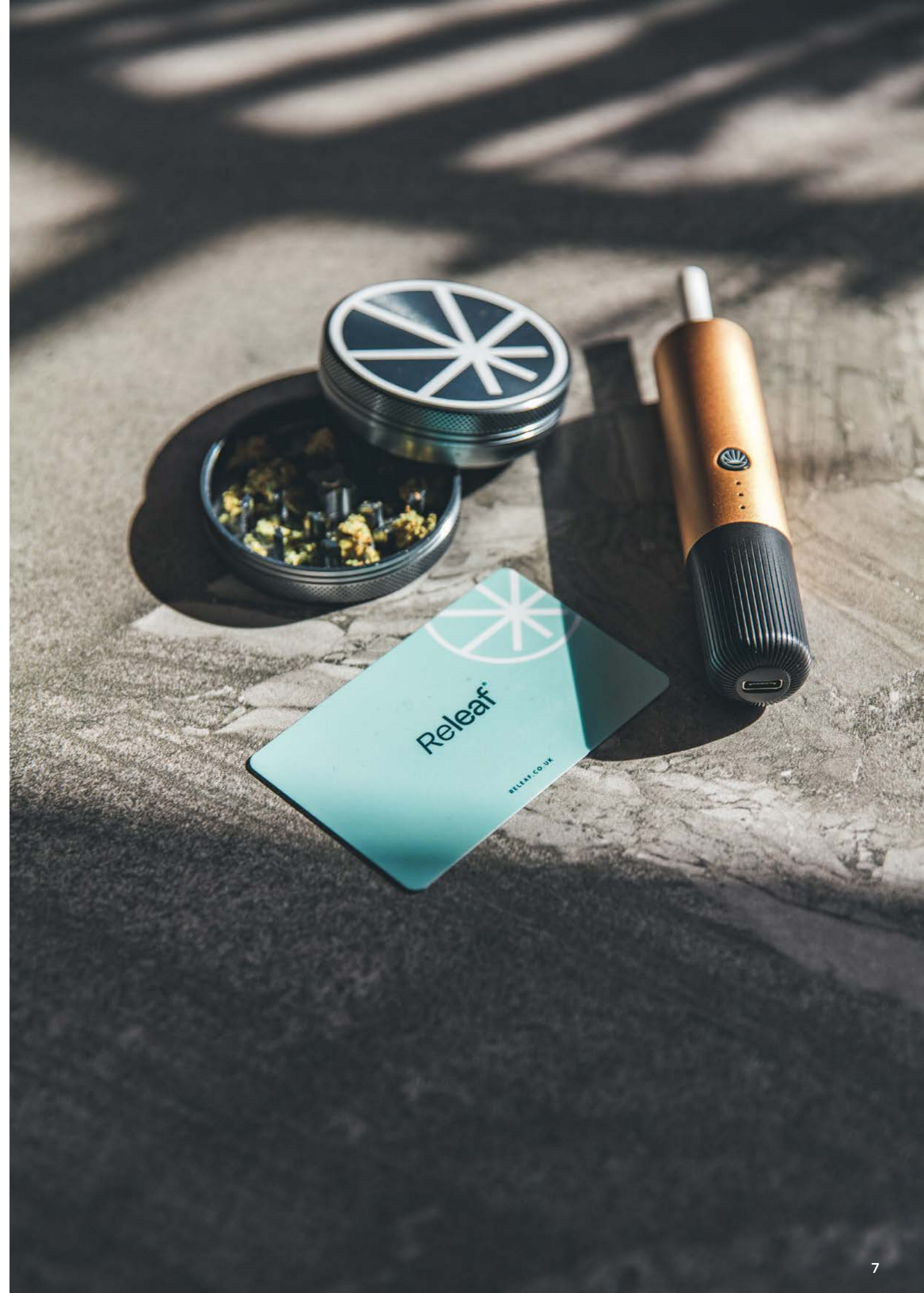
An innovative monthly subscription offers a convenient and secure way for patients to receive their prescriptions direct to their door, with online doctor consults included within the monthly cost.

Unlike all other companies in the UK, Releaf completes the entire patient journey in one platform.

Prospective patients have a video consultation or telephone call with a leading cannabis specialist doctor. If approved, patients are offered a selection of cannabis strains, delivered monthly, containing between 17% and 28% THC, and with a range of ratios to CBD.

A basic subscription to the Releaf platform, which includes the Releaf medicinal cannabis card and access to buy medicinal cannabis (as per a patient's prescription and inclusive of doctor's fees), starts from just £0.99 per day.

First-time subscribers receive a Releaf welcome box within 24 hours of being issued a prescription - containing everything a patient needs to start their new treatment.





The welcome box includes an official, personalised Releaf medicinal cannabis card, a cannabis storage jar to minimise odour and retain quality and potency, a one-button system flower vaporiser, biodegradable flowersticks for use with the vaporiser, and an anodised aluminium cannabis grinder called a 'Puck'.

Unlike all other dispensaries in the UK, Releaf is the first cannabis clinic to gain approval through the Stripe payment gateway and can accept the full selection of credit card/debit card payments.

Other clinics require bank transfers.

Releaf also provides unprecedented patient care and choice with technology that allows a patient to directly increase and decrease dosage, and change their cannabis strain.

For more information, visit www.releaf.co.uk

Executive summary

A number of key insights have been drawn from Releaf's landmark study into the UK's medicinal cannabis landscape today.

Our research confirmed there is a large proportion of people in the UK who have been diagnosed with a condition that can be treated with medicinal cannabis.

This study also shone a light on the significant impact these conditions can have on every aspect of a sufferer's life, and the side effects they experience from current treatments.

It is clear from the research that there is still significant confusion over the legal status of medicinal cannabis in the UK, and that current prescription levels are low.

But there is an appetite for medicinal cannabis, with many people open to exploring this themselves. Over two-thirds of the UK adult population stated they would consider it as a treatment.

However, concerns were raised by our sample about the social stigma and practical issues that surround medicinal cannabis, bringing into stark reality the need for education and reassurance so that potential users of medicinal cannabis can reap its many long-term benefits.

The report also supplied an understanding into the use of off-prescription cannabis in the UK for non-recreational use, and it emerged many have used illicit, street cannabis to improve their health. In one of the most significant studies to date on the topic of medicinal cannabis, we sought to uncover the true picture of medicinal cannabis use and the opinions surrounding it in the UK today.



Key findings

Approximately

29.6 million people

could be potential medicinal cannabis recipients, as **50.2%** of our sample had been diagnosed with a treatable condition.

The impact of illness was blatant, with

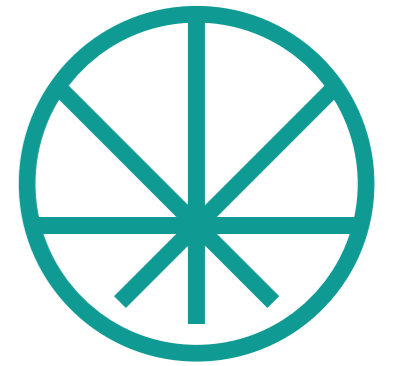
45.6%

of people with treatable conditions reporting that they lived with significant distress and discomfort.

41.5%

of people are aware that medicinal cannabis under prescription is legal, while **34.8%** still thought this wasn't the case and **23.7%** were unsure.

Only two people in our survey (**0.48%**) reported that they had been prescribed medicinal cannabis.



67.7%

of the UK adult population would consider medicinal cannabis as a treatment.

84.98%

of people would find gummies acceptable as a form of medicinal cannabis.

34.16%

were concerned about being perceived to be doing something illegal.

23.78%

said they had taken cannabis without a prescription.



Prevalence of treatable medicinal cannabis conditions in the UK

Many people who have been diagnosed with a health condition in which the severity of symptoms could be eased by medicinal cannabis are completely in the dark that they are actually eligible for a prescription.

Staggeringly, 29.6 million people, half of the UK's adult population (50.2%), have at least one diagnosed medical condition which could mean they are eligible for medicinal cannabis treatment.

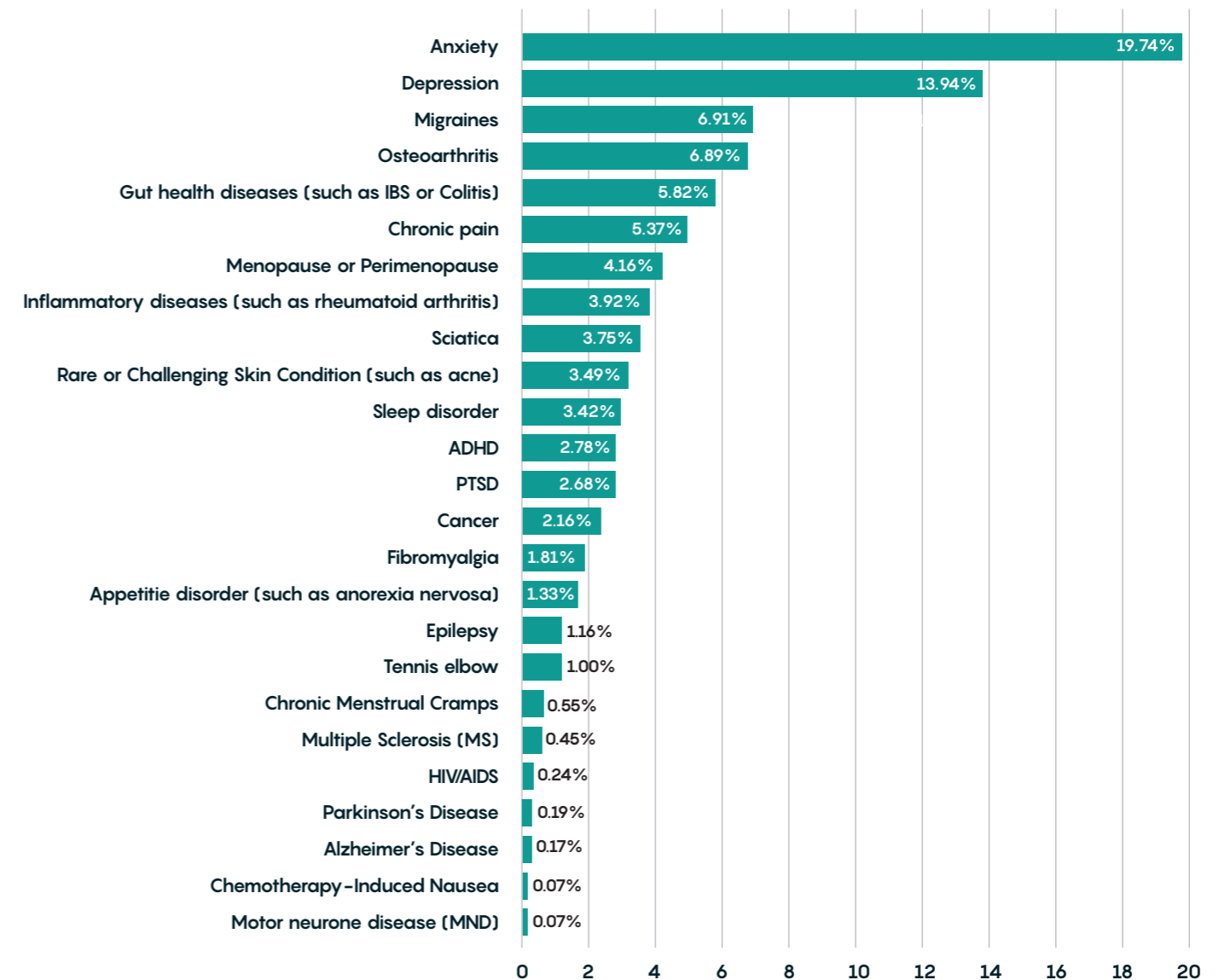
Survey data showed the most prevalent of the diagnosed conditions eligible for medicinal cannabis was anxiety, with 19.74% of respondents reporting that they had the condition.

This was followed by depression (13.94%), migraines (6.91%), osteoarthritis (6.89%), gut health diseases (5.82%) and chronic pain (5.37%) respectively.

Other conditions eligible for medicinal cannabis were reported by smaller numbers of respondents including menopause or perimenopause, inflammatory diseases (such as rheumatoid arthritis), sciatica, rare or challenging skin conditions (such as acne), sleep disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Some respondents also reported a diagnosis of cancer, fibromyalgia, appetite disorder, epilepsy, tennis elbow, chronic menstrual cramps, multiple sclerosis (MS), human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, chemotherapy-induced nausea, and motor neurone disease (MND).

For which of these conditions have you received a formal medical diagnosis – e.g. from a GP?



Our survey also revealed that a portion of society is hidden away from the world of medical cannabis who are unable to access it but may be eligible. 6.83% believe they are living with one of these treatable conditions but are yet to be diagnosed. In terms of the UK adult population, this would equate to an extra 4.03 million people who could be getting medicinal cannabis on prescription.

The six most prevalent conditions (as reported by our sample, including both diagnosed and undiagnosed) are:

anxiety
(25.23%)

depression
(16.44%)

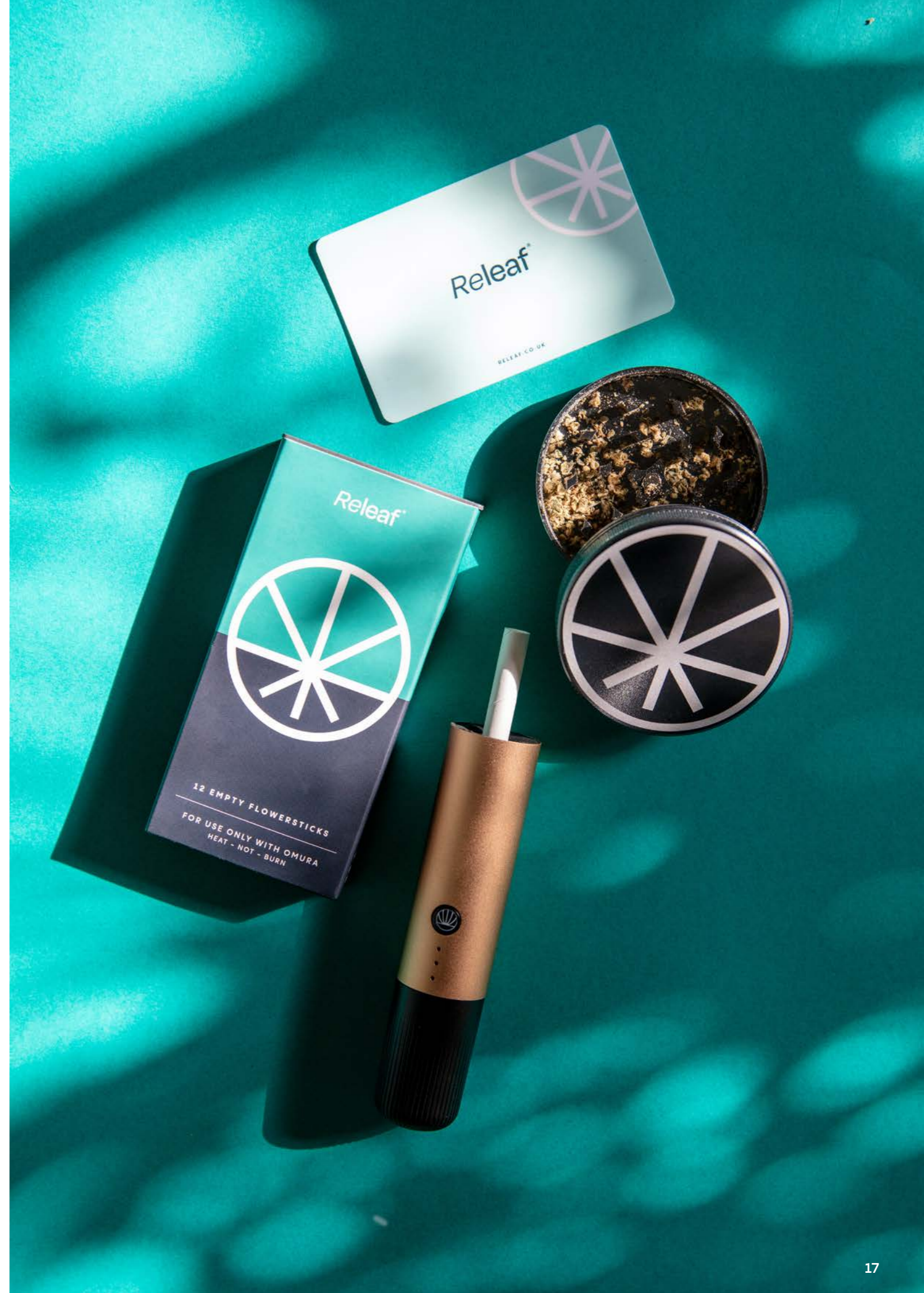
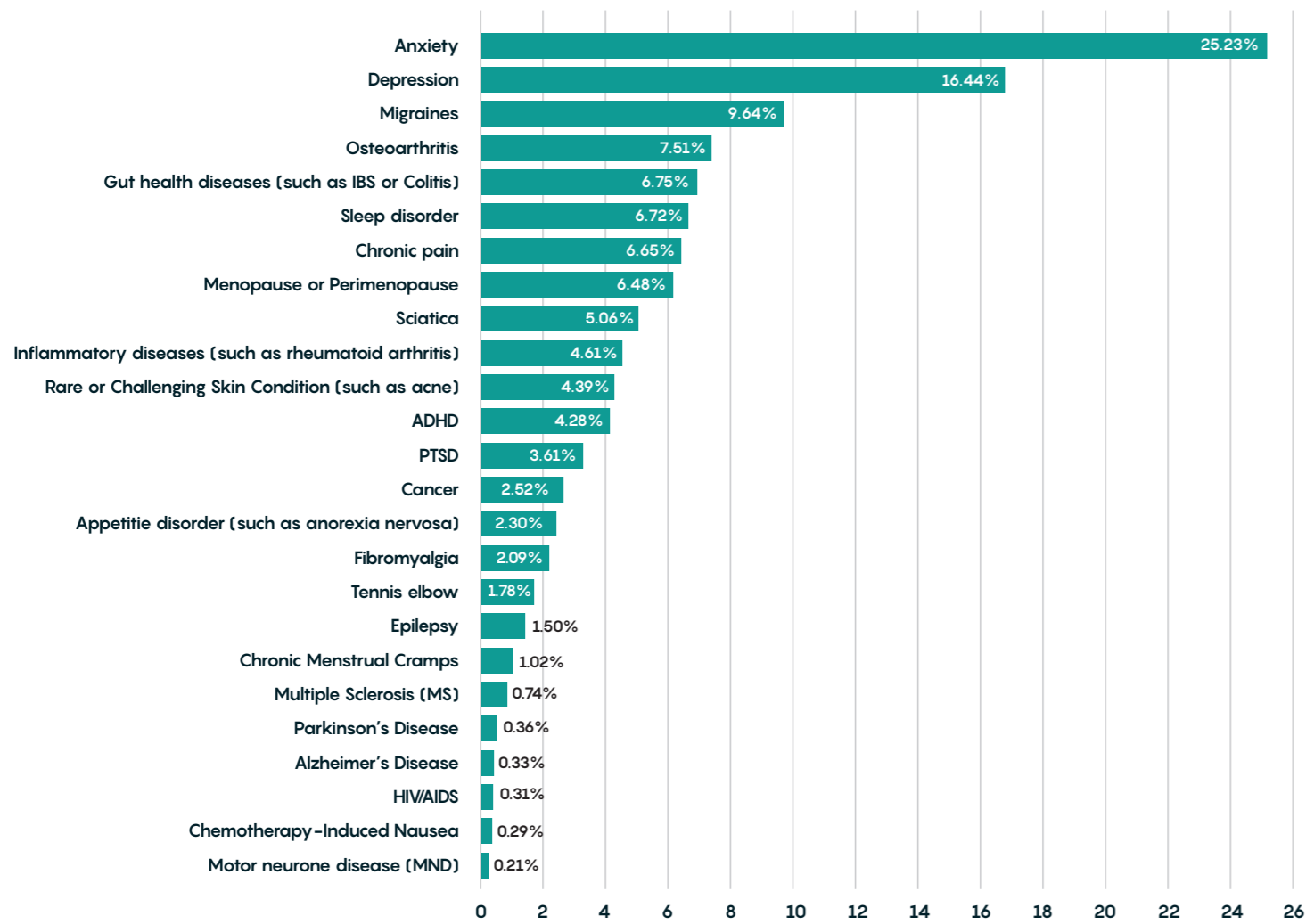
migraines
(9.64%)

osteoarthritis
(25.23%)

gut health
(6.75%)

sleep disorder
(6.72%)

Do you currently suffer from any of the following conditions?





What impact do these medical conditions have on day-to-day life?

The research not only highlighted the prevalence of people who have been diagnosed with conditions treatable with medicinal cannabis, but also the impact these conditions have on sufferers.

Such conditions can majorly influence every aspect of a patient's life. Anxiety, depression and chronic pain, for example, greatly affect someone's day-to-day living, their ability to work or study and their stress levels. The effects of a condition can play a part in their personal lives, and hold them back from thinking about the future positively.

This study broke down the current impact these treatable conditions had on respondents in terms of the level of distress and discomfort, limiting the ability to work or study, quality of family or personal life, and prompting worry about future health.

On average across all conditions, 45.6% of people reported living with significant distress and discomfort. The most challenging conditions included chronic pain, menstrual cramps, appetite disorder (such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge-eating disorder), fibromyalgia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety.

34.94% said their condition had affected the quality of their family or personal life too, with this effect particularly prevalent among sufferers of PTSD, depression, Parkinson's disease, anxiety, appetite disorder and chronic pain.

Many people will be missing out on quality relationships with family and friends while treatments like medicinal cannabis could afford them more time out of pain, allowing them to build and maintain relationships.

The effects on work and studying are also keenly felt, as 32.83% of people reported their condition had limited their ability to do so.

People with conditions like multiple sclerosis (MS), fibromyalgia, ADHD, chronic pain, depression and PTSD found their conditions were the most disruptive in this regard.

Building a career, or preparing for one through study, is an important part of life for most people, and being held back from this because of a health condition is impactful on well-being, both personally and financially.

Planning for the future also becomes an issue when someone is suffering from a health condition without effective treatment. 25.15% admitted their condition had made them worry about their future health, particularly those suffering from cancer, appetite disorder, gut health diseases, inflammatory diseases, anxiety and depression.

In our study, some conditions featured prevalently across all impact areas, suggesting existing treatments are not always meeting the needs of patients. This research suggests more effective treatments, such as medicinal cannabis, should be made readily available where possible and practical, so those who wish to explore it can do just that.

Research has proven medicinal cannabis can effectively treat a range of problems including pain, as it is often considered to be as effective as strong opioid painkillers like codeine for pain relief.

For gastroenterological conditions, medicinal cannabis has been found to help with symptoms and pain, and it can also play a role in promoting good gut health.

Psychiatric conditions may be eased by the ingestion of medicinal cannabis, with CBD known to relieve symptoms of anxiety, depression and PTSD. Medicinal cannabis may also help people with sleep disorders by improving the quality of a night's sleep.

For those diagnosed with cancer, medicinal cannabis may be able to help with the side effects of chemotherapy and anxiety, while offering relief if required for end-of-life care.

People experiencing neurological conditions such as epilepsy, Parkinson's disease and MND can also benefit from medicinal cannabis.

Depending on the condition, medicinal cannabis is often explored when other frontline treatments have not worked, helping those who may have been consistently disappointed by a lack of relief from previous treatments.



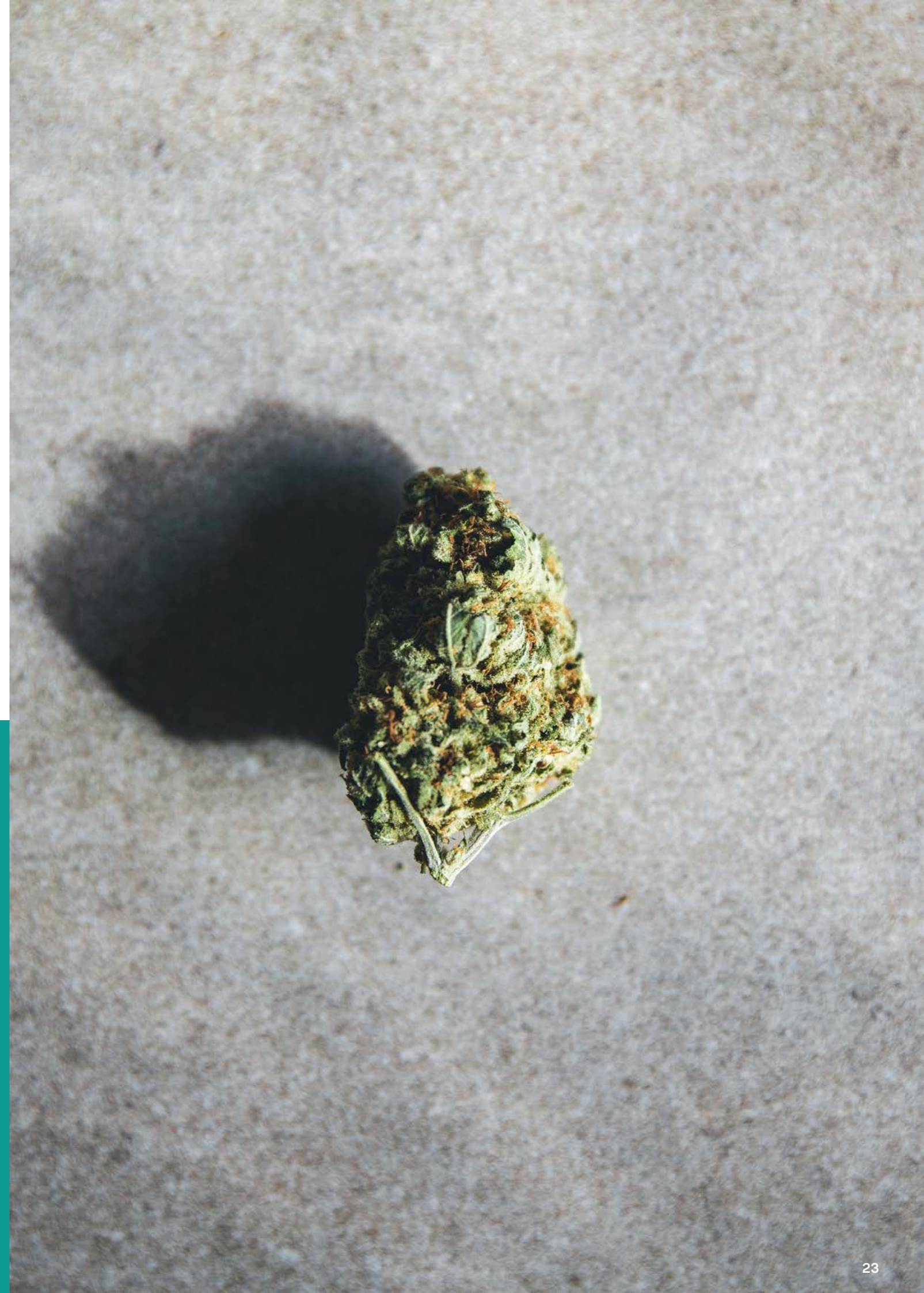
How prevalent are the side effects from current, conventionally prescribed medications?

Our research highlighted that a plethora of respondents experience side effects from their current treatments, which only serves as further evidence that people need to be allowed to explore alternative treatments to manage their symptoms.

Patients may be prescribed powerful painkillers to deal with their pain, but alongside unwanted side effects, these drugs may be ineffective or incredibly strong, leading to long-term reliance on the medication.

46.2% of people across all conditions on average experienced some side effects from their current treatment, our research found. 17.57% of people said they experienced significant side effects, with tiredness, sickness, dizziness, nausea and headaches just some of the problems listed by respondents.

Side effects were most common in those diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, MND, Parkinson's disease, cancer, chemotherapy-induced nausea, HIV/AIDS, MS, epilepsy and fibromyalgia, with more than 50% of people in each of these groups experiencing side effects from treatment.



Public awareness and understanding of medicinal cannabis

Our research highlights that the UK public still has many questions about medicinal cannabis.

Overwhelmingly, 83.7% of respondents said they were aware cannabis can be used to relieve a range of health conditions. However, when it comes to understanding the legalities of medicinal cannabis, there is still much to be done to educate people.

Only 41.5% of people were aware that medicinal cannabis, that is prescribed by a doctor, is legal. Awareness was strongest around conditions such as chronic pain (45%) and anxiety (38%), followed by MS, depression, cancer and epilepsy. A

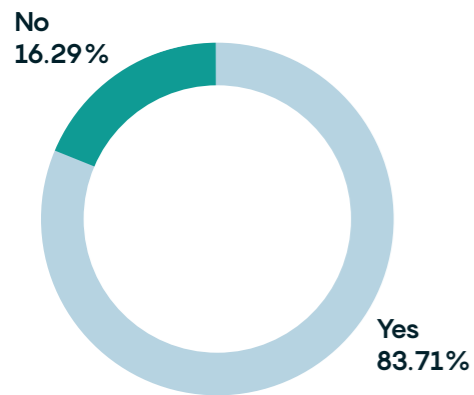
wareness was lowest around Alzheimer's disease, menopause or perimenopause, gut health diseases, rare or challenging skin conditions, tennis elbow and HIV/AIDS.

But 34.8% of people still thought it wasn't the case that prescribed medicinal cannabis is legal, and 23.7% were unsure. As more people are unaware or unsure that medicinal cannabis is legal, it implies much work still needs to be done to bring people up to scratch on the availability of this offering.

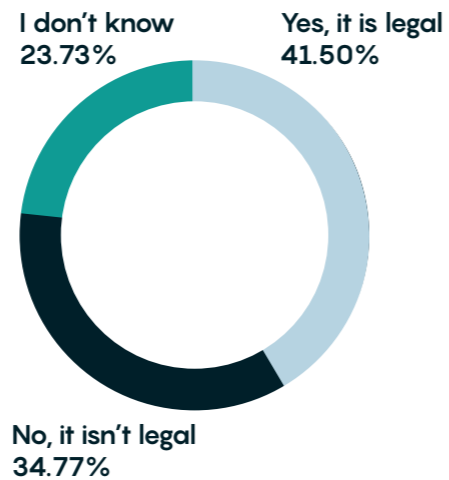
As the consumption of cannabis remains illegal in the UK for recreational purposes, it is clear there is still a significant crossover in people's minds between illicit cannabis and medicinal cannabis.

On a national scale, more attention is clearly needed to raise awareness of this treatment option among the public as it only continues to gain further acceptance within the medical community too.

Are you aware that cannabis can be used to relieve a range of health conditions?



Do you think using medicinal cannabis is legal in the UK?





Consideration towards medicinal cannabis as a treatment in the UK

Medicinal cannabis that has been prescribed can be legally consumed by patients in the UK, but take-up of this treatment is shockingly low.

Our research highlighted that there are still many societal barriers stopping people from accessing the treatment they may desperately need to relieve their symptoms.

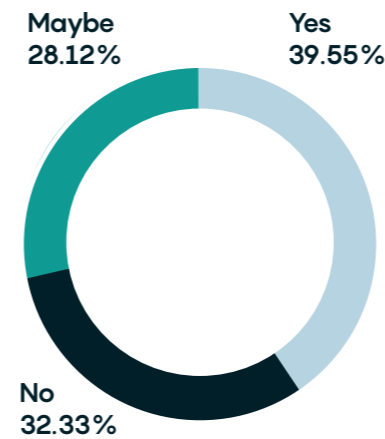
Starkly, only two people from the sample reported that they had been prescribed medicinal cannabis, which equates to 0.48% of the total people surveyed. If this figure was applied to the entire UK adult population of 59 million, it would suggest only 283,200 people currently hold a prescription for medicinal cannabis.

These findings would support that there are many who have conditions that can be treated with medicinal cannabis, but they are not exploring the option.

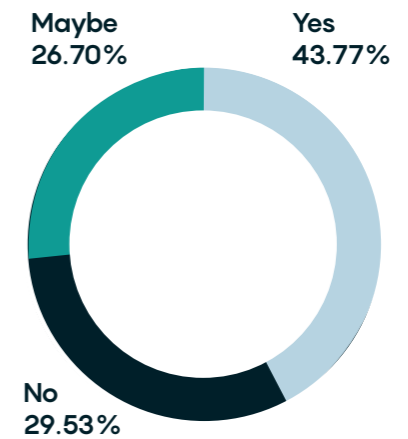
Yet over two-thirds (67.67%) of the population would consider medicinal cannabis as a treatment and 39.55% of people would even be happy to accept it today. Another 28.12% would be willing to consider it as a possibility.

This is slightly higher among people with treatable conditions at 70.47%.

Would you ever consider taking prescribed, medical cannabis? (All UK adults)



Would you ever consider taking prescribed, medical cannabis? (Those with treatable conditions)

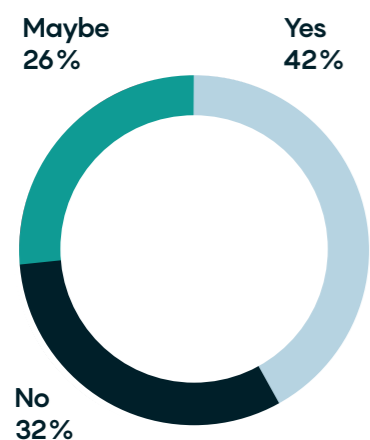


Willingness to take medicinal cannabis was highest amongst the almost quarter of the people surveyed who had taken cannabis previously without a prescription. In this group, 85.81% said they would consider its use, and 68.03% would accept it without question.

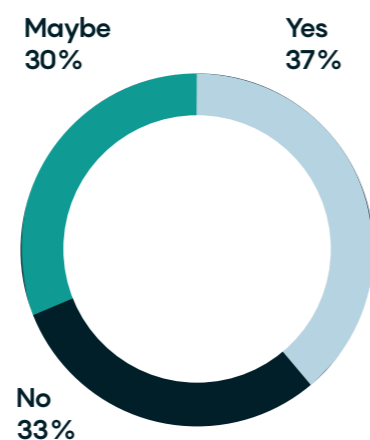
Openness to medicinal cannabis differed between different age groups and genders. Our research found that openness to medicinal cannabis as treatment was higher among men than women and among younger people aged 44 and below.

Within these groups, there was also a smaller population of people who were not willing to consider using medicinal cannabis at all (between 30-38% of people). Between 24%-33% of people did reveal they could be persuaded into changing their mind.

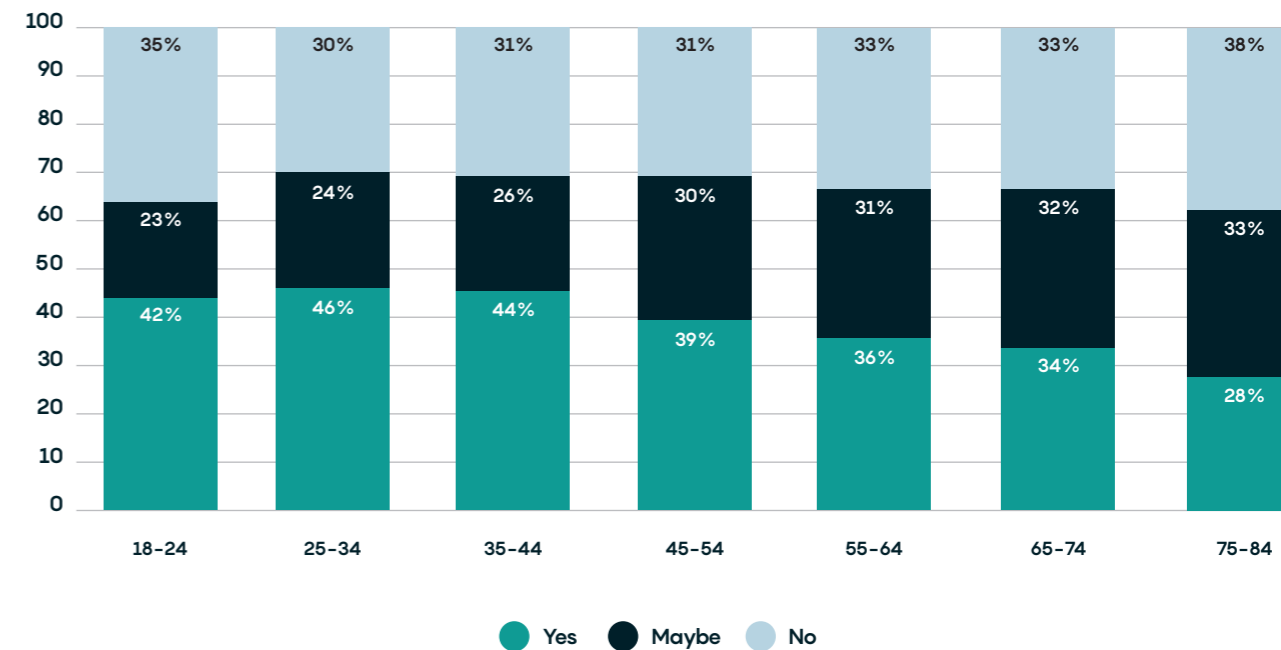
Would you ever consider taking prescribed, medical cannabis? (Men)



Would you ever consider taking prescribed, medical cannabis? (Women)



Would you ever consider taking prescribed, medical cannabis? (By age)



The findings suggest certain groups, particularly older people and women, require further education and reassurance about the benefits of medicinal cannabis, and more awareness in general of what medicinal cannabis is and what it can help with.

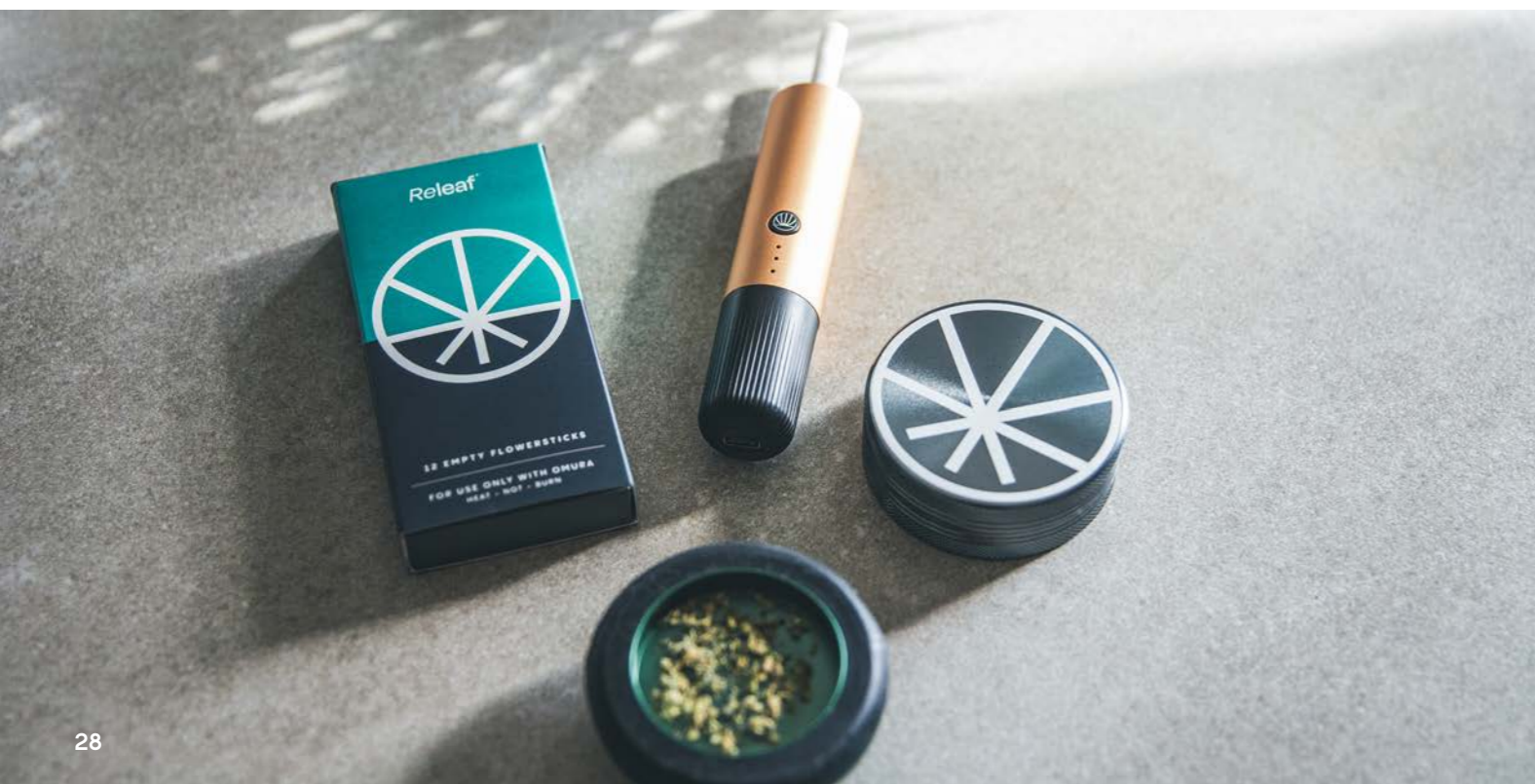
Attitudes towards taking medicinal cannabis differed depending on medical conditions, with acceptance from sufferers highest for conditions such as ADHD, MND, MS, PTSD, chronic pain, inflammatory diseases, fibromyalgia, sleep disorder and anxiety.

Acceptance was lowest among sufferers of gut health diseases, HIV/AIDS, menopause or perimenopause, tennis elbow, rare or challenging skin conditions and chemotherapy-induced nausea.

The research indicates that more people are having conversations with their GP or health team about medicinal cannabis on prescription, as an average of 15.74% of people with treatable conditions reported having discussed this option.

This statistic shows that while only 0.5% of the people surveyed reported possessing a prescription for medicinal cannabis, there are many people interested in finding out more or pursuing this treatment as part of their medical treatment plan.

The proportion of sufferers having these conversations was highest among people with Alzheimer's disease, chemotherapy-induced nausea, HIV/AIDS, epilepsy, Parkinson's disease and MS.





Public concerns and social stigma towards medicinal cannabis

With our research highlighting that so many people are keen to explore medicinal cannabis, what is holding them back from it?

According to a YouGov tracker of public opinion, views surrounding cannabis and its potential harm to humans are mixed but gradually becoming more positive.

In the latest 2023 survey, 35% said cannabis is fairly harmful to people who regularly use it, while 19% said it is very harmful.

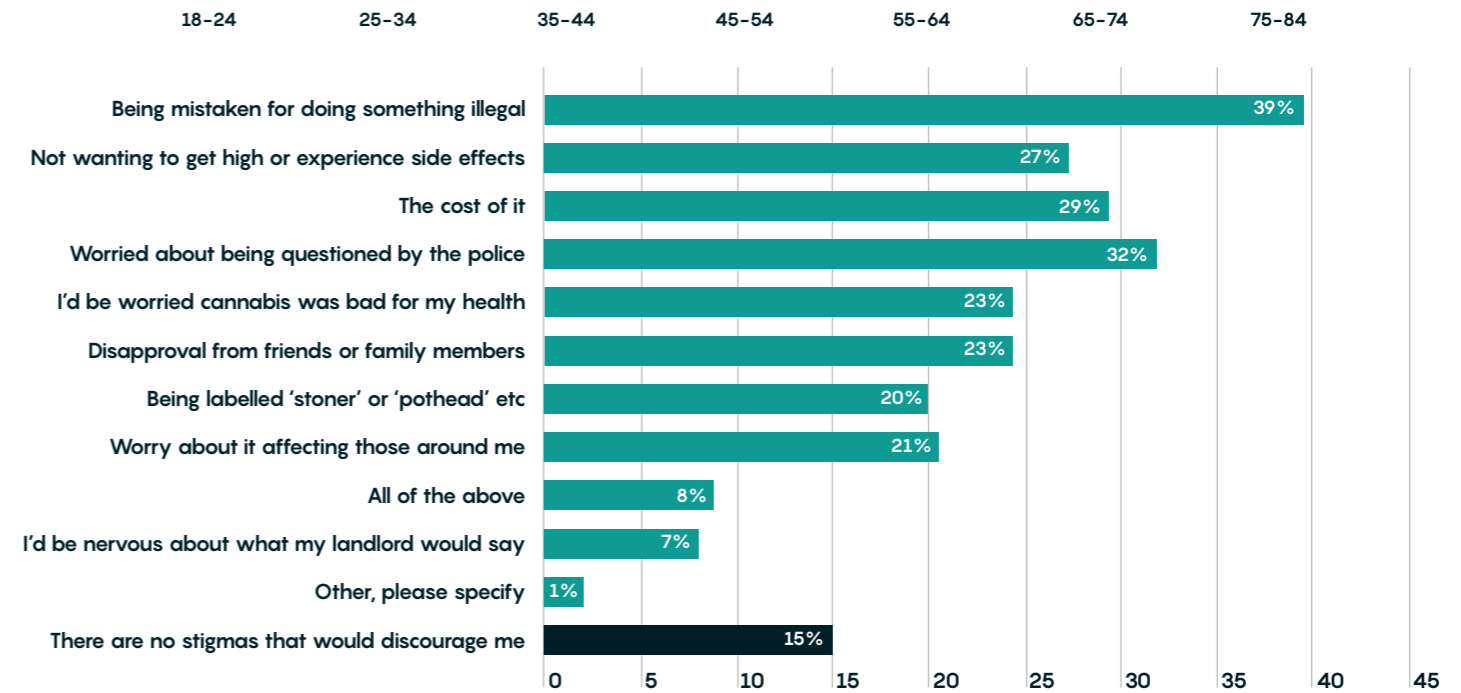
But it appears the number of people who think cannabis is very harmful has dropped 4% since 2019 from 23%. In the latest survey, almost a third said they think cannabis is not very harmful (31%), and 9% said it is not harmful at all.

In our study, respondents shared a number of concerns about the reality of taking medicinal cannabis, with the most significant concern being perceived to be doing something illegal (34.16%).

Just under a quarter of respondents (24.35%) expressed concern about being questioned by the police.

Other common concerns included not wanting to experience a 'high' or side effects, cost, and cannabis itself being bad for someone's health.

Which societal stigmas would discourage you from using medical cannabis if your doctor advised you needed it to manage a health condition it was approved? (By age)



A number of people also cited social stigma as a concern around consuming medicinal cannabis, but this was overall a less significant concern than the previous concerns listed. In this regard, disapproval from family members or friends was deemed of most concern.

Concerns differed between different demographics, with stigmas attached to medicinal cannabis significantly higher among women than men. Stigmas were also more of an issue for younger age groups.

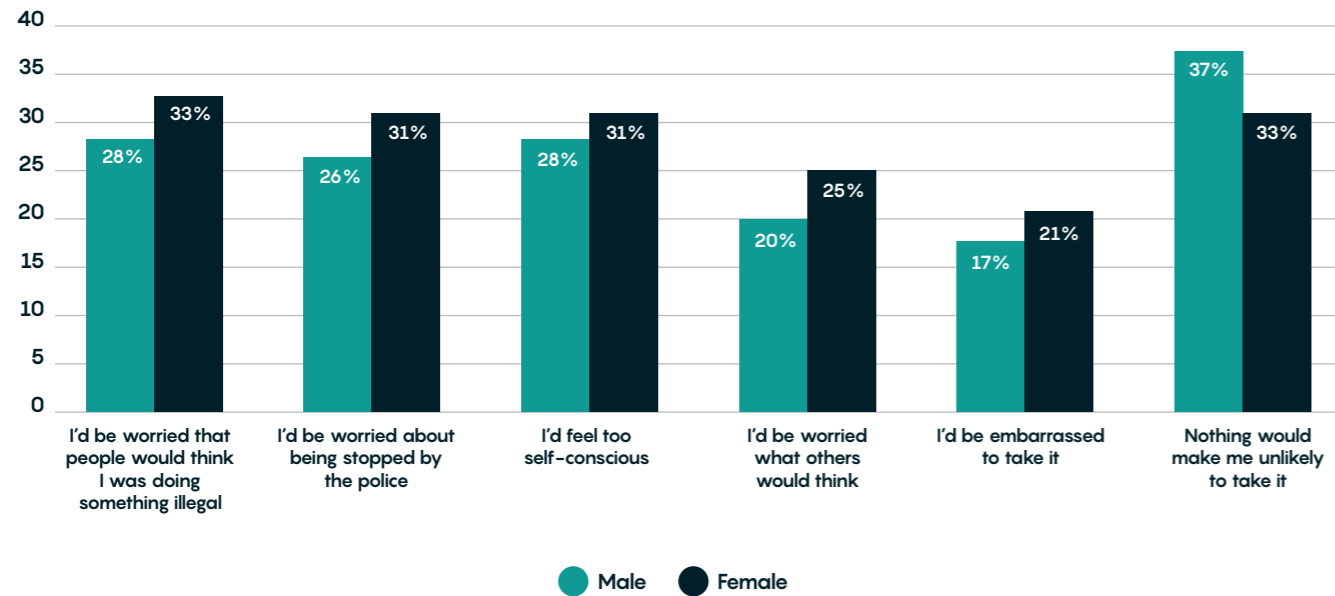
People were more likely to say as they got older that no stigma would prevent them from taking medicinal cannabis if that is what they had chosen to do.

The home was cited as the most popular place to take the medication with 77.05% stating they would like this, and only 15.44% were willing to take it in their car. Consuming medicinal cannabis from the comfort of one's own home was a strong preference across all groups.

This data highlights that there is a general reluctance among the UK population to be seen using medicinal cannabis. Even if they had been instructed by their doctor to take medicinal cannabis outside their own home in order to better manage their condition, 46.29% said they would still be unlikely to do so.

This sentiment was prevalent especially among women and older age groups.

What would make you unlikely to take medical cannabis prescribed by your doctor to manage a health condition or complaint in public / outside your own home?
Please select all that apply (gender) ?



When asked if they themselves would be more supportive of someone they know taking medicinal cannabis, 85.7% said that they were 'likely' or 'very likely' to be supportive.

Only 65.56% said they would tell friends, colleagues, or family members if they were taking prescribed cannabis. Over a third of people were 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to tell others.

Medicinal cannabis is generally well tolerated when prescribed at suitable doses and is considered much safer than other medical alternatives such as opiate painkillers.

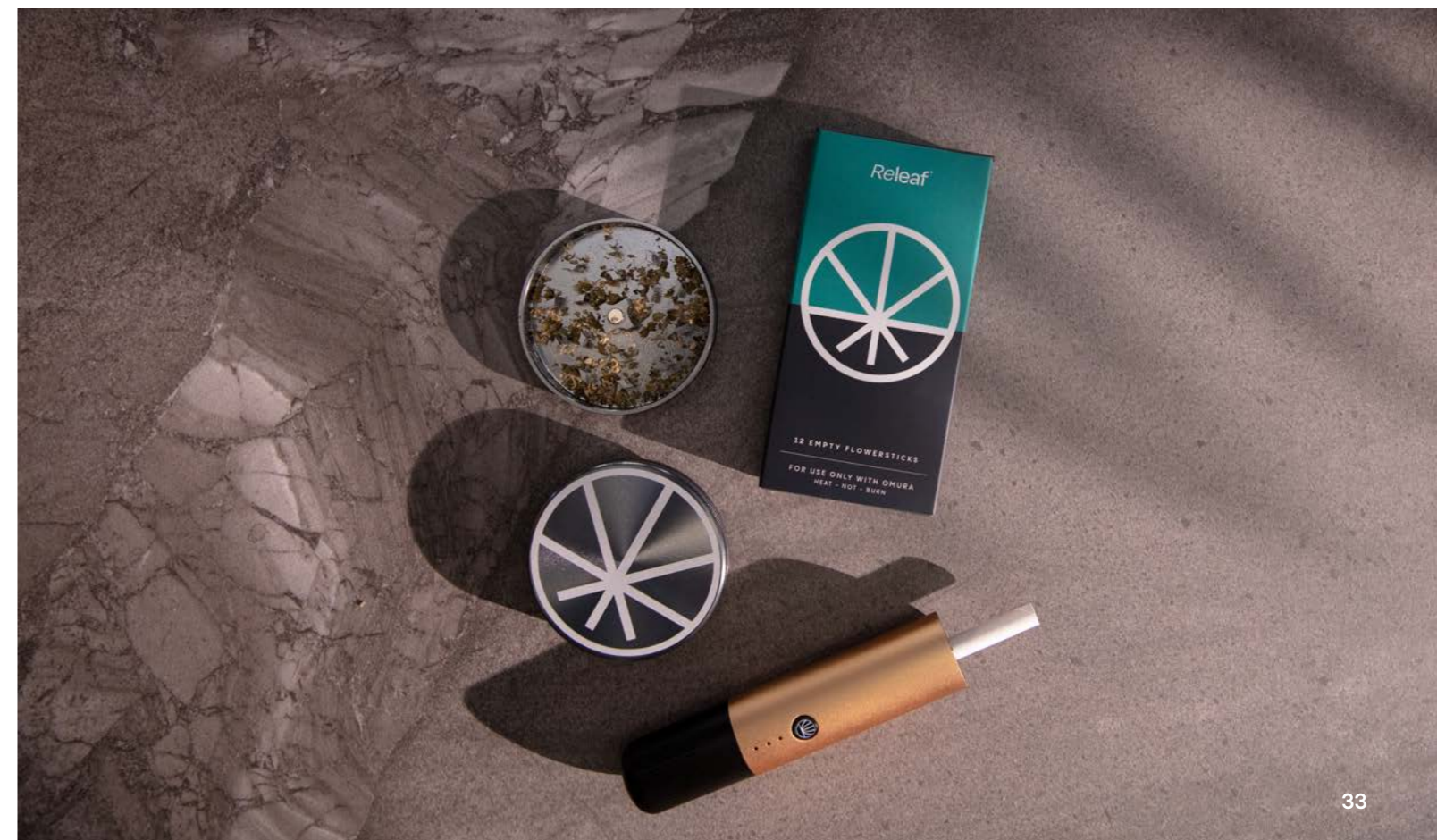
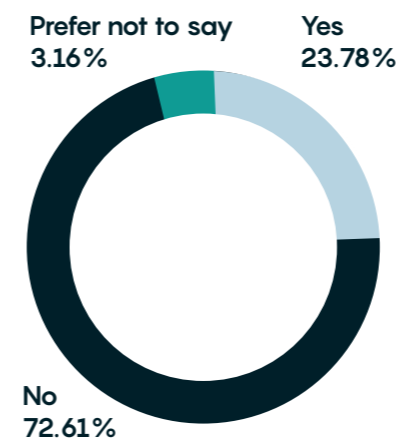
A doctor is required to assess whether medicinal cannabis is the right course of treatment on a patient-by-patient basis during a comprehensive consultation.

What is the scale of off-prescription cannabis use in the UK?

Although medicinal cannabis is legal, our research highlighted that many have taken to consuming street cannabis for non-recreational reasons.

23.78% of our sample said that they had taken cannabis without a prescription. 17.08% said they had used cannabis illegally to treat 'low mood', 16.58% had used it to treat a specific medical condition, and 13.59% had used it to ease the pain.

Have you ever taken cannabis without prescription?

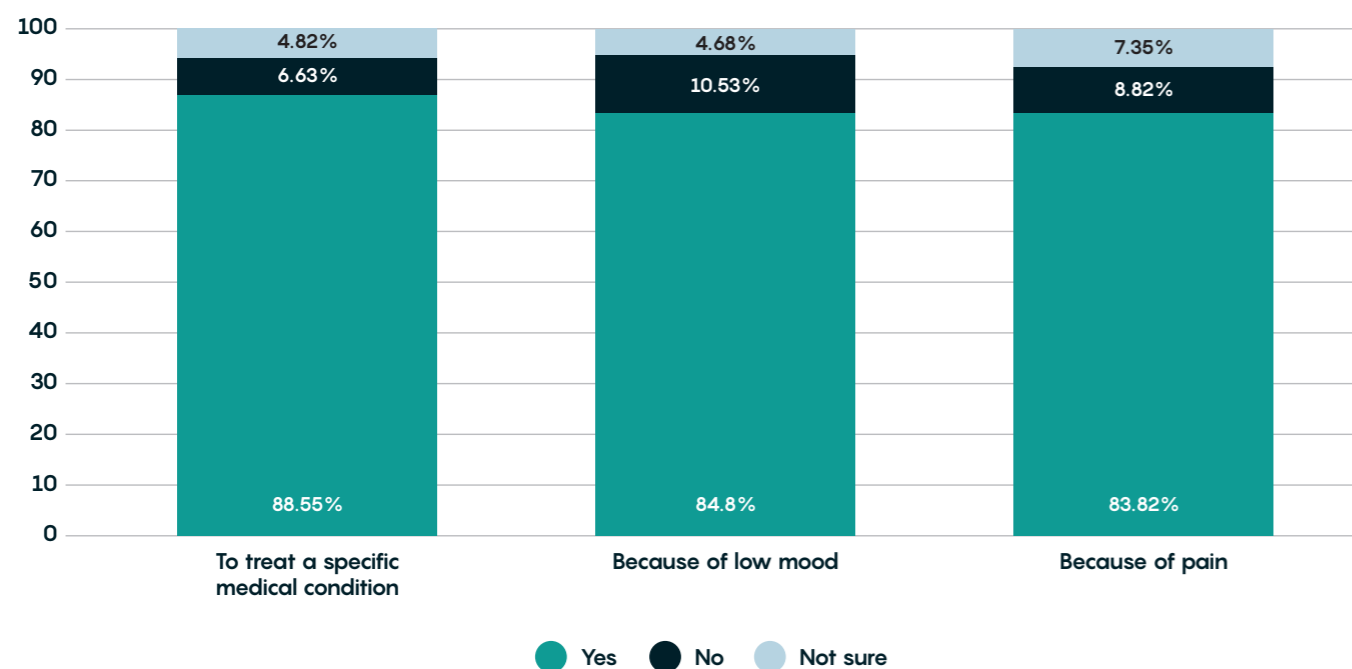


Non-recreational issues of illicit cannabis were highest among age groups below 34. 18-24-year-olds were more likely to use cannabis to treat 'low mood', accounting for 36% of total cannabis users among that age group.

Among the wider population, 22% said they know someone who has used cannabis, either on or off-prescription, to manage a health condition.

Those who have taken off-prescription cannabis for this reason, report a high efficacy rate, with between 88.55% to 83.82% believing it was effective for this purpose.

Was it effective at helping with that need?



Off-prescription use was lowest among older age groups, especially those aged 65 or above, which could indicate why this group has greater reservations about taking medicinal cannabis.

In the UK, cannabis is a Class B drug and it is illegal for recreational use. Possession of cannabis can be punished by an unlimited fine and/or a maximum of five years in prison. But it is not illegal for someone who has been prescribed medicinal cannabis to consume it.



Conclusion

Medicinal cannabis was legalised in the UK in 2018. Yet five years on, our research has laid bare that a large proportion of the UK adult population could be eligible for medicinal cannabis and is not utilising it.

This could be due to unfounded or misguided concerns around medicinal cannabis, fear of stigma, or because they are unaware of how to access it in a safe manner.

Did you know?

There are approximately 29.6 million with a diagnosed condition in the UK which can be treated with medicinal cannabis.

A key conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that awareness building of medicinal cannabis is crucial, as there is still significant confusion over the legal status of medicinal cannabis and the many benefits it offers to those treated with it.

Education and reassurance is clearly required to put people's minds at ease about taking medicinal cannabis, especially for women and younger age groups.

Some of the most prevalent diagnosed treatable conditions in our study, including anxiety, depression, migraines, osteoarthritis, gut health diseases and chronic pain, can be effectively treated with medicinal cannabis, and sufferers must be informed that this option is open to them if they are struggling with their symptoms.

For many, medicinal cannabis is an untapped resource that could be helping a multitude of UK adults who struggle every day with the symptoms and side effects of their current health conditions and medications.

While medicinal cannabis may not be suitable for everyone, increasing access and awareness of this treatment could be invaluable in helping so many more people to lead happy, healthy and pain-free lives.



How can Releaf help?

Releaf is on a mission to transform how patients acquire, use and experience medicinal cannabis.

We offer a medicinal cannabis e-clinic, where patients are assessed by a doctor during a video consultation at a time that suits them.

Patients prescribed medicinal cannabis will be provided with a Releaf medicinal cannabis card, the first of its kind in the UK, which offers peace of mind for patients so they can carry and consume their prescriptions confidently without fear of unwarranted repercussions.

Patients will also receive in their welcome box a 'Puck' and an odour-proof container.

Once prescribed medicinal cannabis, patients can easily manage their subscriptions via their personal dashboard online.

Releaf understands that high upfront patient costs currently in the industry may act as a barrier for some patients, so follow-up consultations and medicinal cannabis prescriptions are combined in one low-cost monthly fee.

There are a range of subscription options available to best suit each patient's lifestyle and budget. Prescriptions are delivered straight to the patient's door discretely to respect patient privacy and confidentiality.

Many countries around the world now offer medicinal cannabis through prescription, and Releaf aims to break the stigma attached to medicinal cannabis in the UK.

Releaf provides a legal, discreet and convenient service to patients, with the aim of offering them relief from their symptoms.







This report details the main findings and conclusions.

If additional analysis is required, please contact:

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