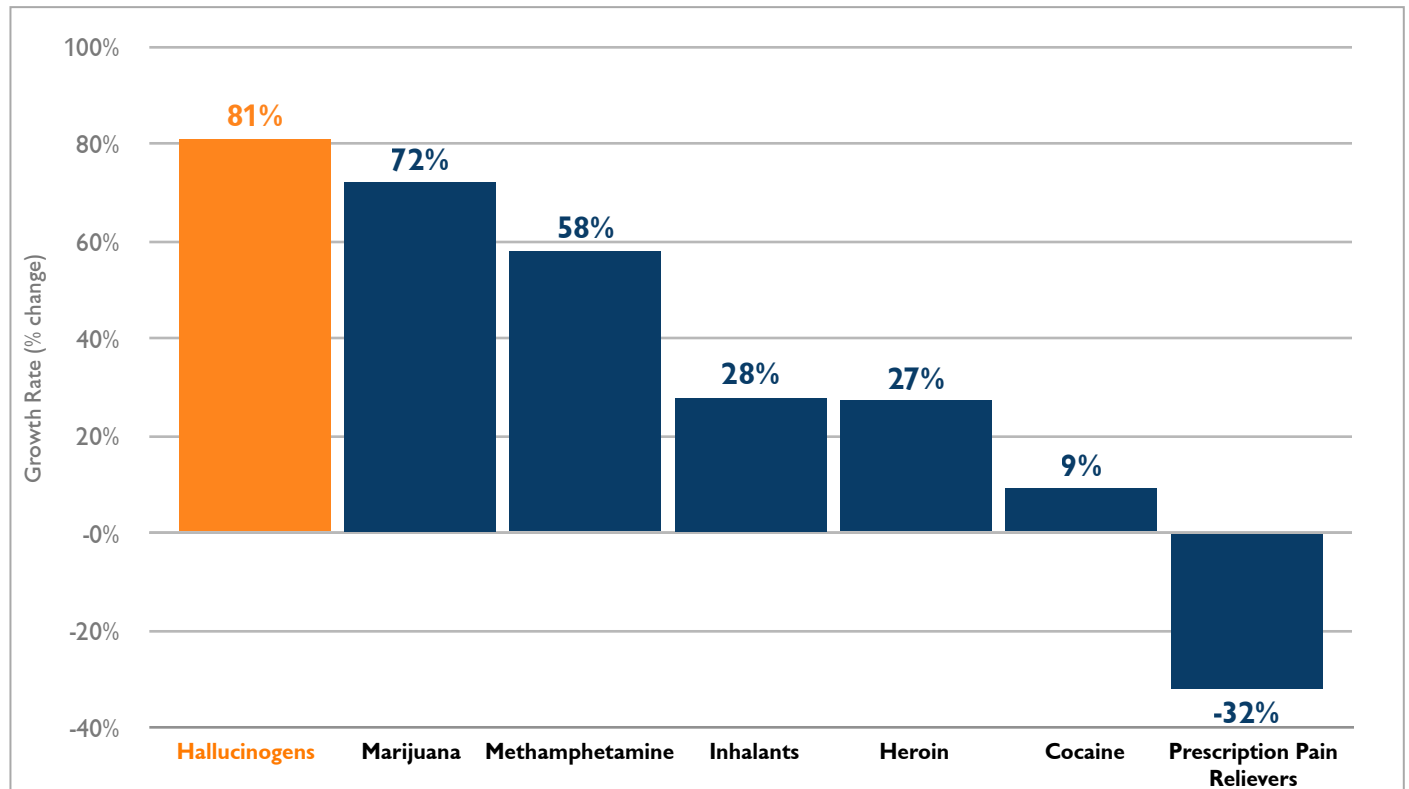


Hallucinogens: Large Increases in Use Since 2015

New data show that nationwide hallucinogen use is growing faster than any other illicit substance. From 2015 to 2022, past-year hallucinogen use grew 81% – increasing from 4.7 million people in 2015 to 8.5 million people in 2022.¹ While hallucinogens have not generally been a major focus of behavioral health or drug control policy, these trend data suggest that they may become a growing issue.

FIGURE 1. SUBSTANCE USE GROWTH RATES, 2015-2022²



WHAT IS A HALLUCINOGEN?

Hallucinogens include psychedelic and dissociative drugs, which can distort a person’s perceptions of reality and alter their thoughts and mood. Psychedelics primarily affect serotonin levels, which cause vivid hallucinations or visions, and can change a person’s perceptions and self-conception. Examples of psychedelic hallucinogens include psilocybin, LSD, DMT, and mescaline. Dissociative drugs affect glutamate processing and can make a person feel detached from their surroundings and body. Examples of dissociative drugs include ketamine and PCP.³

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

Hallucinogen use nearly doubled from 2015-2022, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). While use increased for most drug types over that seven-year period, the hallucinogen trend stands out due to the high rate of change (Figure 1). Past-year hallucinogen use nationwide increased from 4.7 million people in 2015 to 8.5 million people in 2022, an 81% growth rate. Use grew more slowly for most other substances. Marijuana was the only substance with a comparable growth rate, growing by the lesser rate of 72%.⁴

This rise in hallucinogen use coincides with legal and cultural changes in the United States. Over the past several years, Colorado and Oregon legalized adult psilocybin use, several jurisdictions decriminalized psilocybin, and at least 22 state legislatures have considered bills to decriminalize or legalize some set of hallucinogens. At the same time, “microdosing” – regular ingestion of small quantities – has rapidly become more popular⁵, and individuals and practitioners are exploring therapeutic uses for hallucinogens. This trend includes addressing treatment-resistant depression through the FDA-approved version of

ketamine (esketamine) as well as the popularization of off-label psychedelic therapy and other personal use for non-recreational benefits.⁶

LARGEST INCREASES AMONG ADULTS

Hallucinogen use increased across all age groups, but the largest growth rates were among adults – and especially adults over age 50 (Figure 2). Examining change from 2017 to 2022, when data became available for older adults, past-year hallucinogen use more than doubled (+134%) among those aged 26 to 49 and grew by a massive 264% for adults aged 50 and older. Rates of substance use among adults over age 50 increased for most substances (Figure 3), but the rate of change for hallucinogens significantly outpaced other substances by large margins.

CONCLUSION

Hallucinogen use is growing faster than any other illicit drug. Growth rates are highest among adults, and especially high among older adults (aged 50+). Among older adults, substance use is also growing rapidly across several other drugs. Both trends merit careful monitoring, as cultural and legal landscapes continue to shift.

NOTES:

1. SAMHSA. (2023). 2022 NSDUH Detailed Tables. National Survey on Drug Use and Health. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2022-nsduh-detailed-tables>
2. IBID
3. NIDA. (2024). Psychedelic and Dissociative Drugs. National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/psychedelic-dissociative-drugs#work-in-the-brain>
4. SAMHSA. (2023). 2022 NSDUH Detailed Tables. National Survey on Drug Use and Health. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2022-nsduh-detailed-tables>

FIGURE 2. HALLUCINOGEN GROWTH RATES, 2017-2022⁷

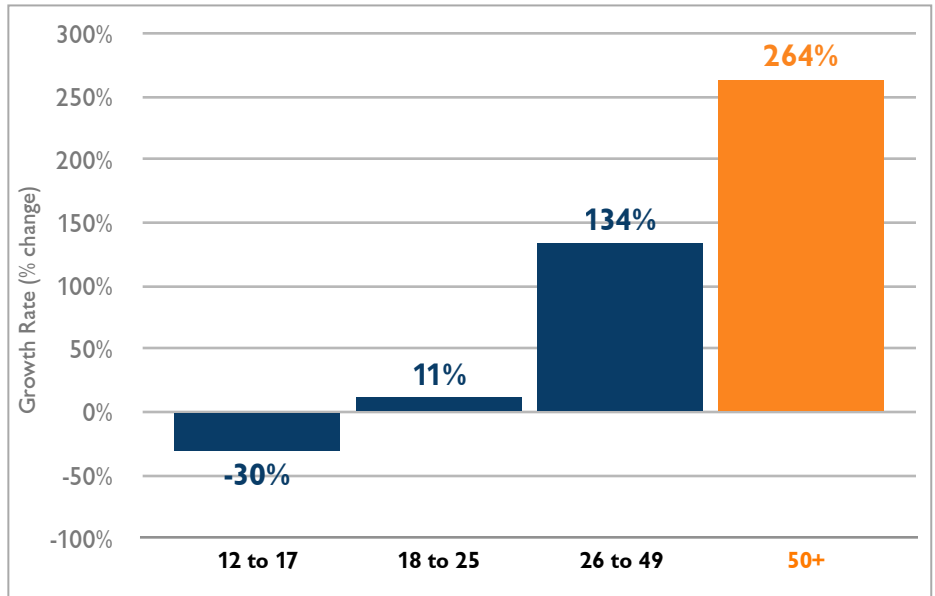
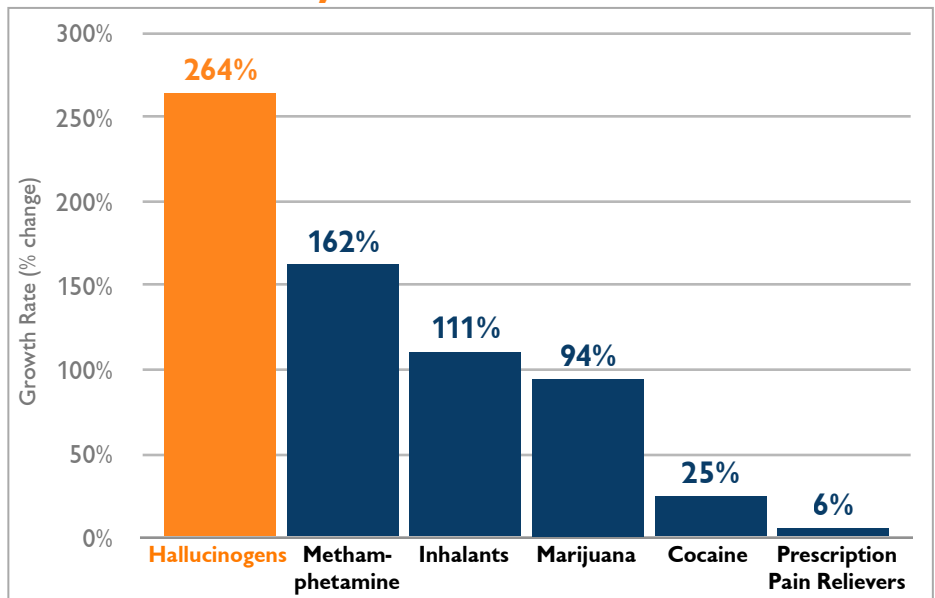


FIGURE 3. SUBSTANCE USE GROWTH RATES AMONG ADULTS AGED 50+, 2017-2022⁸



5. Polito V, Stevenson RJ (2019). A systematic study of microdosing psychedelics. PLoS One, 14(2), e0211023. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0211023>
6. Smith, D. G. (2023). Psychedelics are a promising therapy, but they can be dangerous for some. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/10/well/mind/psychedelics-therapy-ketamine-mushrooms-risks.html>
7. SAMHSA. (2023). 2022 NSDUH Detailed Tables. National Survey on Drug Use and Health. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2022-nsduh-detailed-tables>
8. IBID



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