

1 in 5 Depressed Americans Are Self-Medicating With Screens, Cannabis, Weight-Loss Drugs & More, New Report Finds

NeuroKaire's 'Self-Medication Generation' Report (18,000+ responses) Finds Americans Are Doing More to Treat Themselves Than The System Is Doing to Treat Them

KEARNY, NJ, UNITED STATES, June 17, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- One in five Americans report being diagnosed with depression, and many of them aren't waiting for the healthcare system to cure them. A new report from precision psychiatry company [NeuroKaire, The Self-Medication Generation](#), finds that depressed adults across every generation are sidestepping the standard trial-and-error approach to mental health treatment and instead creating their own DIY treatment stacks. Self-prescribed without professional guidance, the resulting coping mechanisms are often based on information they get from fragmented sources like Reddit, TikTok and peer conversations. According to the report, the alternative treatments depressed Americans are turning to include a mix of cannabis, CBD, Rx and OTC weight-loss medications, increased screen time, video and mobile games, and even crafting, among other behaviors.

Currently, when Americans seek professional treatment for depression, they enter a trial-and-error process: get prescribed an antidepressant, wait weeks to see if it works, then start over if it doesn't. On average it takes a patient 12-18 months to find the right medication. Each failed attempt can lead to more side effects, more appointments, more time unable to work and more money spent on a treatment that may do nothing. It is a system that is failing a population that can least afford to get it wrong.

The Self-Medication Generation documents that people have stopped waiting for the system to catch up and instead have taken matters into their own hands to find alternative treatments that work for them. The report is based on a national survey of 18,341 U.S. adults fielded by [Prosper Insights & Analytics](#) and analyzed by NeuroKaire. Of that group, 3,737 reported having been diagnosed with depression. Their behaviors, spending patterns, employment status and media habits look sharply different from the general population, and the data explains why so many have decided to go off-script.

The Self-Medication Generation is the first installment in NeuroKaire's multi-part Depression in America Research Series.

Americans with depression can't afford the healthcare system's current prolonged trial and

error.

Treating depression comes with a litany of hidden costs, from therapy appointments and comorbidities to medications and the quiet toll of time — hours spent in waiting rooms, on hold with insurance, or simply recovering from the effort of getting help in the first place. And these costs add up for adults with depression not only affecting how they feel, but reshaping what they earn.

- Adults with depression earn 12 to 23% less than their peers, and the gap gets worse with age. By the Boomer generation, depressed adults earn nearly a quarter less.
- Nearly half of depressed adults (47%) are on government health insurance. Among depressed Millennials, who should be in their peak earning years, 40% are on government insurance. This is 80% more than their Millennial peers. More than one in four depressed Gen Zers (27%) is also unemployed.
- Nearly 1 in 3 adults with depression (28%) doesn't have a credit card. No credit card means no ability to float a copay, cover an out-of-pocket supplement or absorb the cost of a medication that doesn't work.

Depressed Americans are using cannabis as a mental health tool, not a recreational one.

When seven in ten young CBD users with depression say they're using it specifically for mental wellness, that's not getting high. That's self-prescribed treatment for a condition the healthcare system hasn't solved. And it's not just a young person's behavior.

- Half of Gen Z adults with depression (50%) use marijuana, compared to 44% of their peers. But the real story may be at the other end of the age spectrum: Boomers with depression use it 71% more than their peers, the widest generational gap in the data.
- Seven in ten Gen Z CBD users with depression (70%) say they use it specifically for mental wellness, 59% more than their peers. Boomers with depression are 69% more likely than their peers to do the same, making this a shift that spans every generation.

“This data confirms what patients have been telling us with their behavior: one-size-fits-all treatment doesn't work,” said Dr. Talia Cohen Solal, CEO of NeuroKaire. “When half of young adults with depression are using marijuana and Boomers are adopting telehealth at twice the rate of their peers, you're looking at a population that has moved on from the system. The science to match treatment to individual neurobiology exists now, and the healthcare system hasn't yet caught up with what patients already know.”

Americans are leaning into “wellness” culture to heal their depression.

The relationship between depression and weight is well documented clinically, but the behavioral data tells a more specific story. Depressed Americans aren't just more likely to say they're overweight. They're reaching for weight-loss medications, both prescription and over-the-

counter, at rates that outpace their peers in every generation.

- Adults with depression are 67% more likely than the general population to take prescription weight-loss drugs. Boomers with depression show the most extreme gap at 117% more than their peers, suggesting the relationship between depression and weight management deepens over a lifetime.
- Depressed adults are also 50 to 75% more likely to use OTC weight-loss supplements. With GLP-1 medications now entering the mainstream, understanding how drugs like Ozempic interact with depression and antidepressants is quickly becoming one of the most pressing clinical questions ahead.
- Beyond drugs, younger generations believe physical activity will improve mental health. Depressed Gen Z adults are more likely than their non-depressed peers to watch their calorie intake (46%) and exercise at least three times a week (29%).

Screen time isn't the only solitary activity depressed Americans are engaging in.

The popular narrative about depression and screens usually stops at "too much screen time." The data tells a different story. Yes, depressed Americans are digitally immersed. But they're also crafting, reading, gardening and taking photographs at rates that far outpace their peers.

- Two-thirds (67%) of Gen Z with depression play video games as a primary leisure activity, and 35% spend their free time in online communities, 66% more than their peers.
- Boomers with depression are 100% more likely to use telehealth than their peers, the strongest telehealth gap of any generation. They're also 52% more likely to participate in online communities, matching Gen Z's relative gap almost exactly.
- The biggest behavioral gap between depressed and non-depressed Gen Z isn't screens. It's crafting. Thirty-three percent (33%) report it as a hobby, 83% more than their peers. They're also reading books at 45%, challenging the assumption that this generation only engages through screens.

When it comes to medicine, Boomers are more influenced by social media than Gen Z.

It's typically assumed that younger generations are the most susceptible to media influence on their health decisions, but the data says otherwise. Across nearly every channel, from social media to product reviews to mobile video, Boomers with depression are the most media-influenced generation when it comes to what medicines they buy.

- Boomers with depression are 67% more likely than their peers to say social media influences their medicine purchases, 75% more likely to be influenced by mobile video and 54% more by product reviews.
- About one in four adults with depression regularly searches online for medical information. Boomers with depression search 67% more than their peers, the largest gap of any generation, further proof that this age group's digital health engagement has been dramatically

underestimated.

The Self-Medication Generation is based on responses from 18,341 U.S. adults surveyed by Prosper Insights & Analytics between January and February 2026. The depression cohort includes 3,737 individuals identified by self-reported health conditions. The full report is available at [NeuroKaire.com](https://www.neurokaire.com).

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About NeuroKaire

NeuroKaire is a precision medicine company helping patients with psychiatric and neurological conditions find the right medication sooner. Rather than relying on trial and error, the NeuroKaire platform pairs a patient's genetic profile with a pioneering approach: growing a patient's own brain cells in the lab from a simple blood sample to reveal how the cells respond to different medications—before a prescription is ever written. NeuroKaire also partners with pharmaceutical and biotech companies to bring this science into drug development. Learn more at www.neurokaire.com.

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