

AN INDEPENDENT RESEARCH REPORT

# The Self- Medication *Generation.*

How Americans with depression are building their own treatment stacks,  
and what that means for the future of mental healthcare.

<h2>18,341</h2> <p>U.S. adults surveyed by Prosper Insights &amp; Analytics</p>	<h2>52%</h2> <p>of the depression cohort are Gen Z and Millennials</p>	<h2>3,737</h2> <p>individuals self-identified with depression</p>
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## IN THIS REPORT

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A five-section analysis of how depression is being managed—clinically, behaviorally and economically—across four generations of American adults.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Across the U.S., many adults with depression are no longer waiting for the system to *catch up*.

Over 51 million U.S. adults report a depression diagnosis. Across every generation, they are assembling their own treatment stacks—combining cannabis, CBD, weight-loss medications, digital health tools and online research to manage their mental and physical health on their own terms.

Drawing on independently collected survey data from more than 18,000 U.S. adults, fielded by Prosper Insights & Analytics, this report reveals the scope and specificity of these patterns. The data paints a portrait of a population that is proactive, media-savvy, economically vulnerable and biologically unique. Their behaviors show that they know, intuitively, that one-size-fits-all treatment does not work, and that there are clear generation-specific approaches to addressing their depression.

## SEVEN FINDINGS

- 01 Depression is a young person's crisis to transform.** Gen Z and Millennials make up 52% of the depression cohort. This population is younger, more digitally native and more health-conscious than the one the mental healthcare system was built to serve.
- 02 Self-treatment with cannabis-derived substances is widespread.** Half of Gen Z adults with depression (50%) use marijuana. Among Gen Z CBD users who have depression, 70% say they use it specifically for mental wellness. That's 60% higher than their peers—the highest of any generation.
- 03 Depression, weight and medication form a co-occurring cluster.** Adults with depression are 70% more likely to take prescription weight-loss drugs than the general population. Of all generations, depressed Boomers show the most extreme gap. They're 120% more likely to take prescription weight-loss drugs than their peers.
- 04 Screens serve as both a coping tool and a health portal.** Boomers with depression are 100% more likely to use telehealth and 60% more likely to use medical apps than their peers. Two-thirds of Gen Z with depression play video games as a primary leisure activity, and they're 60% more likely than their peers to turn to online communities.
- 05 AI is emerging as a trusted source of healthcare decisions.** More than a third of every generation with depression already uses generative AI, with usage rising as high as 45% among Millennials. Across all generations, nearly one in five would trust agentic AI with healthcare decisions.
- 06 Boomers are the most media-influenced generation for medicine purchases.** Across social media, mobile video, product reviews and internet channels, Boomers with depression over-index on media influence more than any other generation.
- 07 Economic barriers make treatment failure even more costly.** Every failed antidepressant has the potential to add weeks of lost productivity, prolonged symptoms and continued reliance on out-of-pocket alternatives. Considering that adults with depression are 130% to 190% more likely than their peers to be unable to work, getting the medication match right the first time isn't a clinical preference, it's a financial necessity.

*All of this sets the stage for a larger conversation about the future of depression treatment, and why it must be personalized. After all, people are already personalizing on their own. They're just doing it without guidance.*

METHODOLOGY

# Who has depression in America, and how this study measures them.

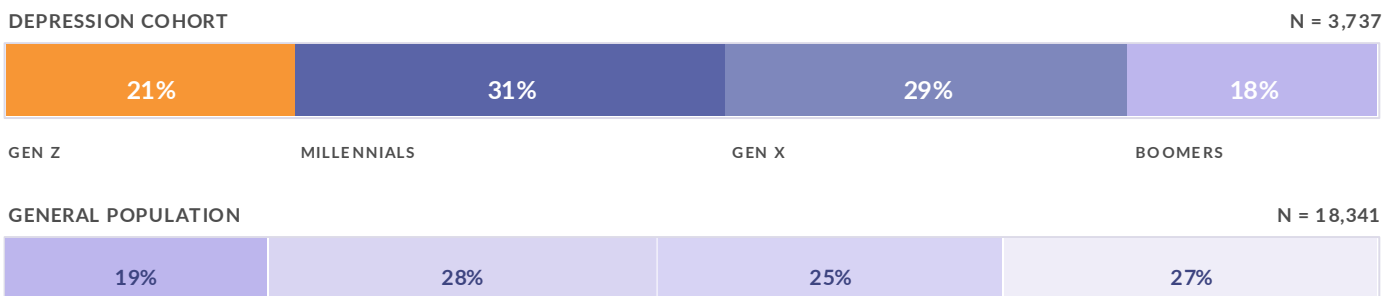
"The Self-Medication Generation" is part one of the Depression in America Research Series by NeuroKaire. The study was conducted by third-party research firm Prosper Insights & Analytics and analyzed by NeuroKaire.

All findings presented are based on responses from a national sample of **18,341 U.S. adults aged 18+**. The depression cohort includes 3,737 individuals identified by self-reported health conditions. All data was collected between January 26 – February 27, 2026.

<p><b>3,737</b></p> <p>U.S. adults in the depression cohort, identified by self-reported health conditions</p>	<p><b>18,341</b></p> <p>U.S. adults in the total survey sample, age 18+</p>	<p><b>4 gens</b></p> <p>Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers compared at every level</p>	<p><b>Jan–Feb 2026</b></p> <p>Field period, fielded by Prosper Insights &amp; Analytics</p>
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Generational composition

## Who has depression in America? A generational snapshot of the **3,737-person cohort**.



## Generational Breakdown • Depression Cohort vs. General Population

GENERATION	DEPRESSION (N)	FULL GENERATION (N)	% OF GEN
Gen Z	799	3,355	24%
Millennials	1,088	4,754	23%
Gen X	1,116	4,688	24%
Boomers	652	4,700	14%
Seniors (65+)	82	844	10%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3,737</b>	<b>18,341</b>	<b>20%</b>

### Gender Breakdown

Depression over-indexes among women.

GENDER	DEPRESSION	GENERAL
Female	61%	51%
Male	39%	49%

### Economic Context

Depression cohort vs. general population.

METRIC	DEPRESSED	GENERAL	GAP
Disabled (unable to work)	14%	6%	+130%
Unemployed	15%	10%	+50%
Government insurance	47%	39%	+20%

Of the 3,737 people with depression, 14% are disabled, 15% are unemployed and 47% are on government insurance. Each of these rates is significantly higher than comparable stats for the general population. Notably, for the nearly half of depressed adults covered by government health plans, the cost of inefficient treatment is ultimately borne by the system itself.

#### HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

Throughout this report, we compare behaviors between Americans with depression and the general population. For generational comparisons, each generation's depression cohort is compared against the full population of that same generation, rather than against the overall adult population. This isolates the effect of depression within each age group.

**Sampling:** Prosper Insights & Analytics employs a scientific process measuring consumer intentions, behaviors and motivations via online panelists representative of the U.S. adult population. Data collected and tabulated in the United States.

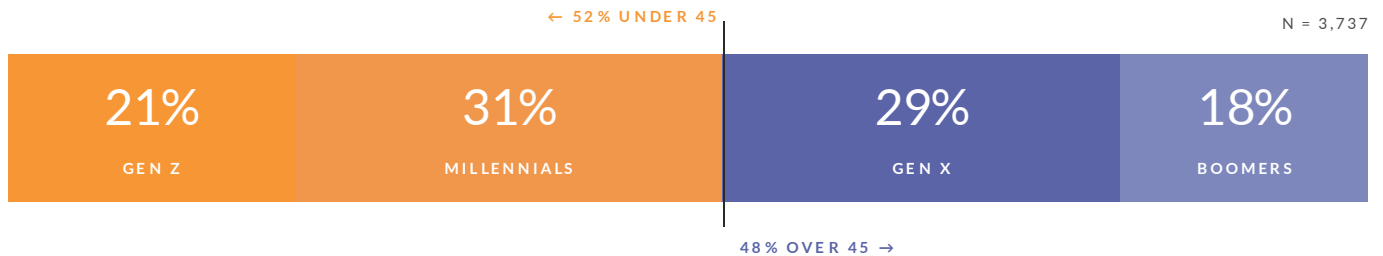
# Depression is a generational crisis, and the system isn't *keeping up*.

Depression in America is divided along generational lines. Gen Z and Millennials together make up one half of the depression cohort (52%). Gen X and Boomers make up the other half (48%). But that's where the similarities end.

## CHART 01 DEPRESSION BY GENERATION

## More than half of depressed Americans are under 45, but the system was built for a *different generation.*

Gen Z and Millennials together account for 52% of the depression cohort. Gen X and Boomers split the remaining 48%.



These younger populations are more digitally native and more health-conscious than the generations the U.S. mental healthcare system was built to *serve.*

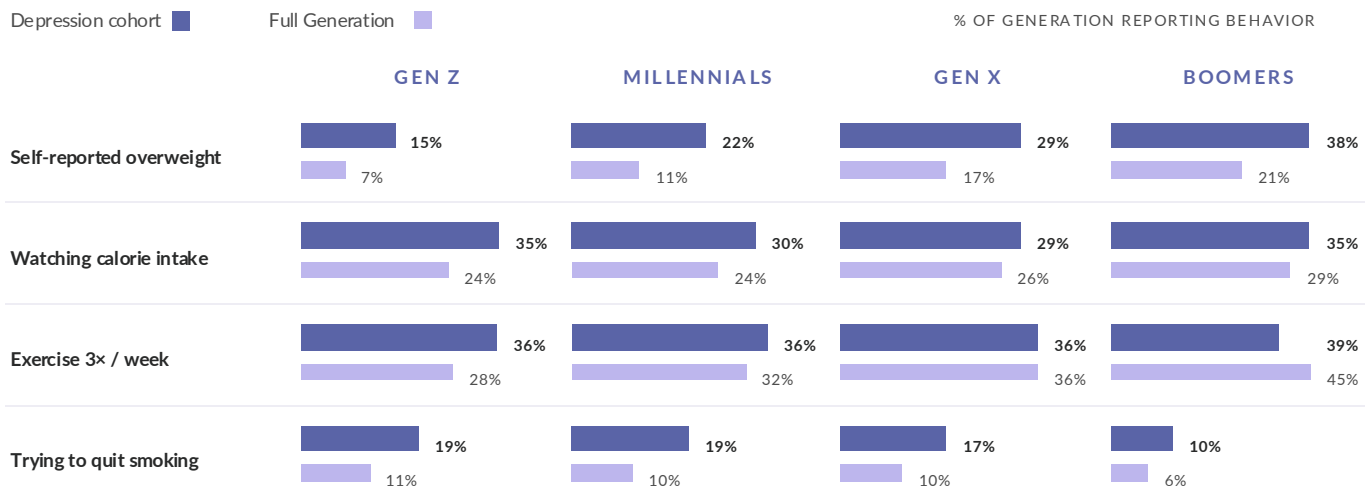
The current healthcare system prescribes the same playbook it always has: prescribe an antidepressant, wait several weeks to see if it works, try another if it doesn't. And the cycle continues.

But this approach is outdated and no longer acceptable for younger, more digitally native and health-conscious populations. This is one reason younger populations are already going off-script. Gen Z and Millennials are the generations most inclined to take health into their own hands and the most skeptical of one-size-fits-all treatments.

## CHART 02 EFFORT VS. OUTCOME

## Gen Z with depression exercises and diets more than any other generation *yet still struggles the most.*

Across self-reported overweight respondents, Gen Z adults with depression out-pace their non-depressed peers in terms of calorie-watching, exercise and quitting smoking.



Survey question: "Regarding your health, which of the following are you doing?" Source: Prosper Insights & Analytics, Jan -Feb 2026.

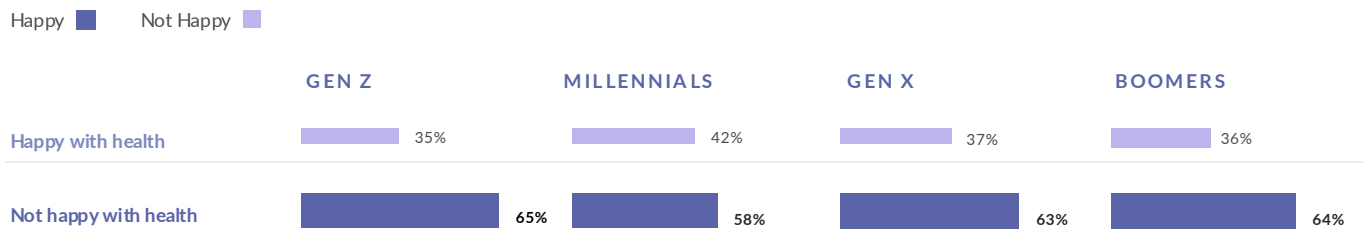
### Gen Z adults with depression are proactively managing their physical health at rates that far exceed their peers.

- Gen Z is the most physically proactive generation in the depression cohort, but they're still 114% more likely to identify as overweight than their peers (15% vs. 7%).
- Depressed Gen Zers say they're 46% more likely than the general Gen Z population to watch their calorie intake (35% vs. 24%), and about 29% more likely to exercise at least three times a week (36% vs. 28%).
- Across all generations, adults with depression are 78% more likely than the general population to be trying to quit smoking (16% vs. 9%).

## CHART 03 HEALTH HAPPINESS

## Gen Z with depression is doing the most for their health *yet feeling the worst about it.*

Health happiness: "Happy" or "Not Happy," by generation, within the depression cohort.



Survey question: On a scale of 1–5 with 1 being "Totally Unhappy" and 5 being "Totally Happy," how would you rate your happiness level on: Your health.

### Gen Z is putting in the effort but not always getting the outcome they want.

Depressed Gen Z adults are doing everything the wellness industry tells them to do: exercising more (29% more than their peers), monitoring calories (46% more) and trying to quit smoking (73% more). Yet they are 114% as likely as their peers to identify as overweight and report the lowest health happiness of any generation. The effort-outcome gap is widest here.

#### GEN Z IS PUTTING IN THE EFFORT BUT NOT ALWAYS GETTING THE OUTCOME THEY WANT.

Younger generations instinctively understand that their depression is something they need to proactively address to get under control. They're doing everything the system tells them to do: exercising, adjusting their diets, trying to quit smoking. But for many, effort alone doesn't close the chemical gap in their brain when treatment isn't matched to their individual neurobiology.

This further underscores the core problem with one-size-fits-all antidepressant prescribing. Two patients can present with identical symptoms and follow identical lifestyle recommendations, yet their responses to the same medication can be completely different. The science now exists to understand that individual response, and to match the treatment to the individual brain from the start, rather than subjecting patients to months of trial and error.

# The economic cost of getting treatment *wrong*.

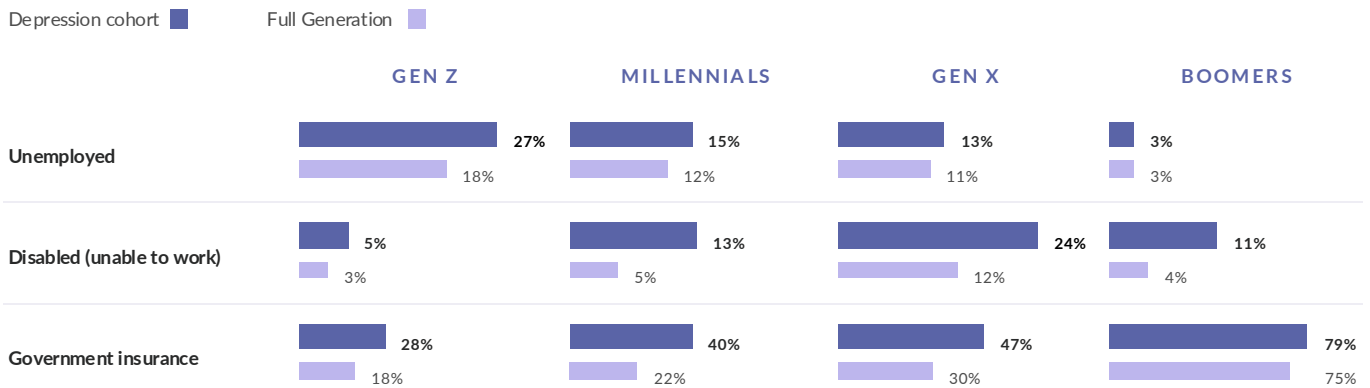
The self-treatment patterns revealed in this study appear to be structural responses to a healthcare system where finding the right depression treatment usually means failing through several wrong ones first. For an economically vulnerable population, each failure additionally carries a cost that goes beyond the clinical.

## A population that can't afford trial and error.

Across every generation, adults with depression face steeper economic barriers than their peers. They earn less, are more likely to rely on government health insurance and are dramatically more unlikely to be able to work.

CHART 04 THE ECONOMIC PROFILE OF DEPRESSION

# Depressed adults are more likely than peers to be *unemployed, unable to work and uninsured.*



Survey questions: Do you have health insurance? / Do you have any of the following credit cards? / Occupation: Disabled (Unable to work).

Depressed Gen Z adults are not only more likely than their own peers to be unemployed, they're more likely than any other adults—depressed or not—to be without employment. More than a quarter of depressed Gen Zers are unemployed (27%). This is 11 points more than their Gen Z peers and 12 points more than depressed Millennials, the second most likely group to be unemployed.

## The population absorbing the cost of every failed antidepressant trial is also the *one least equipped to absorb it.*

- Depressed Gen Xers and Millennials are 67% – 160% more likely than their peers to be unable to work due to a disability. Depressed Boomers also see a huge contrast at **160% more likely** to be disabled (and unable to work) than their peers.
- Nearly half of all depressed adults (47%) are on government health insurance. Across all generations, depressed adults are more likely than their peers to be on government health insurance.
- Millennials may technically be in their peak earning years (roughly ages 28–43 in 2026), but those with depression are 80% more likely than their peers to be on government insurance. Forty percent (40%) of depressed Millennials are on government insurance, compared to 22% of their Millennial peers.

### FOCUS THE TRIAL-AND-ERROR TAX

## For depressed adults, every week spent on the wrong medication is a week of potentially lost earning *potential they may never recover.*

The average patient with depression tries two to three antidepressants before finding one that works. Each failed trial carries compounding costs: the copay for the medication itself, the follow-up appointments, the weeks of side effects that can make it difficult or impossible to work, and the continued reliance on out-of-pocket alternatives, such as those documented in this report, all while waiting for the prescribed treatment to take effect or be replaced.

For someone on Medicaid with no credit card and a disability, this isn't just an inconvenience. It's a cycle that deepens the very economic vulnerability that makes effective treatment so urgent in the first place.

**FOCUS** THE FINANCIAL PROFILE OF DEPRESSION

The economic vulnerability documented here isn't limited to employment status. *It extends into daily financial infrastructure.*

Across every generation, adults with depression earn less than their peers. The gap widens with age.

### Average Household Income · Adults With Depression vs. Full Generation

GENERATION	DEPRESSED	PEERS	GAP
Gen Z	\$43,677	\$49,693	12% less
Millennials	\$57,031	\$70,292	19% less
Gen X	\$54,061	\$68,625	21% less
Boomers	\$51,407	\$66,635	23% less

Survey question: What is the annual total income of your household?

The gap between depressed Gen Zers' household income and that of their peers is the smallest at 12%, but Gen Z is also the youngest cohort, with less time for depression to compound its economic effects. By the Boomer generation, depressed adults are earning nearly a quarter less than their peers.

**Depression doesn't just affect how people feel.** Over a lifetime, it contributes to reshaping what they earn.

In addition to having relatively less income to their peers, fewer of them have the financial tools to absorb unexpected costs. Nearly one in three adults with depression, for instance, doesn't have a credit card. They are 16% – 34% less likely to have credit cards than their peers, across every generation.

### "I don't have a credit card" · Adults With Depression vs. Their Peers

GENERATION	DEPRESSED (NO CC)	PEERS (NO CC)	GAP
Gen Z	31%	23%	34%
Millennials	28%	20%	20%
Gen X	31%	25%	25%
Boomers	23%	16%	16%
All adults	28%	20%	20%

Survey question: Do you have any of the following credit cards?

## CLOSING SECTION 02

# Every failed antidepressant isn't just a clinical miss. *It's a financial event.*

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. When this population cycles through two or three antidepressants before finding the right one, they're doing it without the financial cushion many Americans take for granted.

The self-medication economy documented in this report is what happens when a system built on trial and error meets a population that can't afford *the error*.

Each attempt to find an antidepressant is characterized by costs this population often can't afford, as well as appointments they can't afford to miss and side effects that can make it impossible to work. Multiply that by two or three attempts and it's clear why this population is building its own treatment stacks.

For the nearly half of depressed adults on government insurance, those costs don't disappear. They're absorbed by the system itself. Every failed antidepressant trial generates costs on both sides of the equation: the patient pays in side effects, lost wages and out-of-pocket alternatives, while the system pays in repeated prescriptions, follow-up visits, and — when treatment fails entirely — the downstream costs of disability, emergency care, and workforce dropout.

## TREATMENT MODELS HAVEN'T CAUGHT UP TO WHAT SCIENCE NOW MAKES POSSIBLE

The data shows a population that is disproportionately reliant on government insurance, disproportionately disabled and disproportionately unemployed. These aren't separate problems. They're the compounding result of a treatment model that hasn't yet caught up to what the science now makes possible.

When an individual's neurobiology can tell us which medication is most likely to work for them before they ever take the first pill, personalized treatment selection should no longer be treated as a premium upgrade. Instead, it's the difference between finding effective treatment in weeks versus months, or not at all. This approach would eliminate the financial and human cost of guessing — both for the patient and the system paying the bills.

# The shadow *pharmacopeia.*

Americans with depression are significantly more likely than the general population to manage their mental and physical health on their own terms. This isn't limited to one generation or one substance, it's a multi-layered, cross-generational behavior that suggests current treatment is leaving significant gaps.

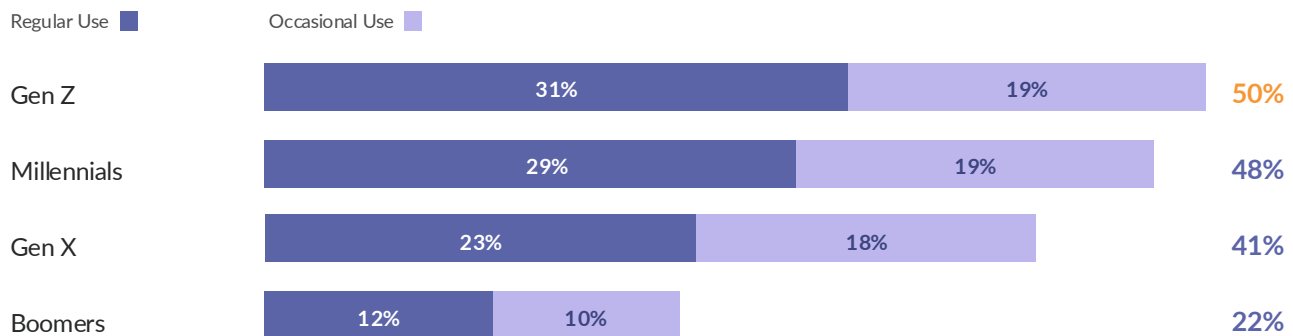
## Cannabis-derived substances, ranging from *recreational to therapeutic*.

Americans with depression are turning to cannabis-derived substances, from marijuana to CBD, at striking rates. There's also a clear progression from the recreational-adjacent use of marijuana to the explicitly therapeutic use of CBD.

### CHART 05 MARIJUANA USE

50% of Gen Z with depression uses marijuana. *Depressed boomers are 71% more likely than their peers to use it.*

DEPRESSION COHORT ONLY



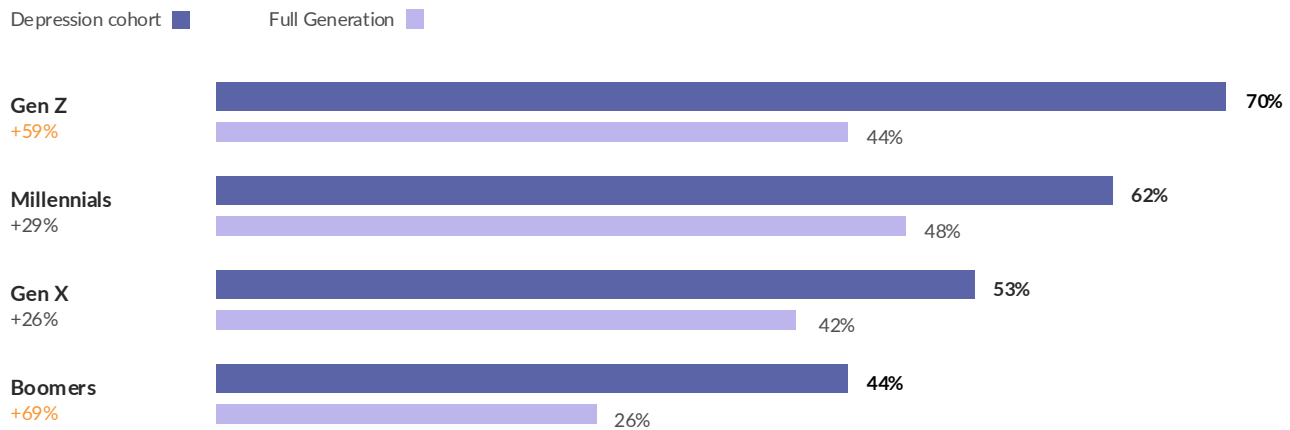
Survey question: Do you use marijuana?

- **Half of Gen Z adults with depression use marijuana.** This number accounts for those who use it both regularly and occasionally, and compares to the 44% of the larger Gen Z population that use it regularly (24%) and occasionally (20%).
- **Regular marijuana use is elevated across every generation, but the pattern differs sharply by age.** Among Boomers with depression, regular marijuana use runs at about 12%, which seems low compared to Gen Z and Millennials, but that's **71% more** than their non-depressed Boomer peers (7%). This is the highest relative gap of any generation.
- **Older adults with depression are turning to cannabis at dramatically higher rates than their peers,** even though their absolute usage remains lower.

## CHART 06 CBD FOR MENTAL WELLNESS

## 7 in 10 Gen Z CBD users with depression use it *specifically for mental wellness.*

Depressed individuals turn to CBD for mental wellness at particularly high rates.



Survey question: What do you use CBD products for?

- Among Gen Z CBD users with depression, **70% say they use it specifically for mental wellness.** This not only means that they're 59% more likely to use CBD than the larger Gen Z population, but that seven in ten of an entire generation's CBD-using depression cohort is explicitly seeking mental health benefits from a cannabis-derived product.
- Boomers with depression are 69% more likely to use CBD than Boomers overall. The pattern holds across all generations, with Boomers showing the second-highest relative gap: 44% of Boomer CBD users with depression use it for mental wellness, compared to just 26% of Boomer CBD users overall.

Taken together, the cannabis data reveals a population that is actively self-treating with plant-based substances and doing so with increasing intentionality. The prevalence of marijuana use (which may serve multiple purposes) and CBD use specifically for mental wellness suggests that Americans with depression are not just using these substances recreationally. They are building treatment regimens outside of the clinical system.

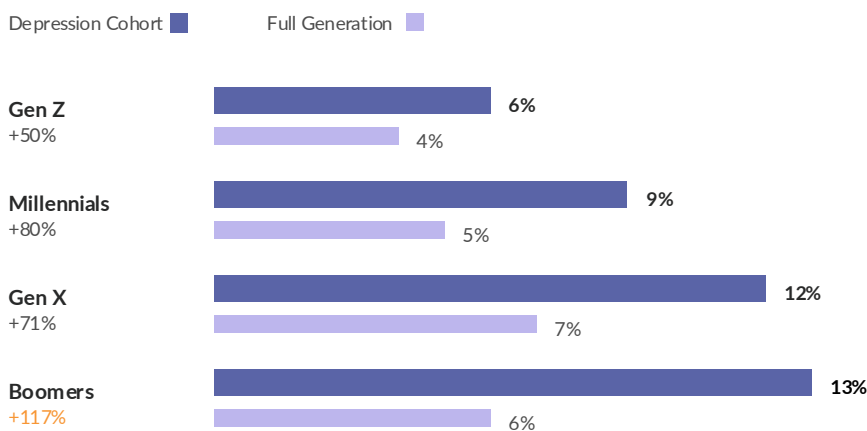
70% of Gen Z's CBD-using depression cohort is explicitly seeking mental health benefits from a *cannabis-derived product.*

## When depression, weight, and weight-loss drugs *collide*.

The data reveals a cluster of co-occurring patterns: people with depression are more likely to claim being overweight and are disproportionately more likely to use weight-loss medications.

### CHART 07 RX WEIGHT-LOSS DRUGS

## People with depression use Rx weight-loss drugs at much higher rates, *and the gap escalates with age*.



Survey question: Regarding your health, which of the following are you doing?

- Adults with depression are **67% more likely than the general population** to take prescription weight-loss drugs (10% vs. 6%).
- **People with depression use weight-loss medications at much higher rates than their peers.** This pattern escalates with age: Gen Z at 50% more likely than their peers, Millennials at 80% more likely, Gen X at 71% more likely, and Boomers at 117% more likely.

### SNAPSHOT OTC WEIGHT-LOSS SUPPLEMENTS

PEOPLE WITH DEPRESSION LOOK TO OTC WEIGHT-LOSS SUPPLEMENTS MORE THAN THEIR PEERS

**+67%**

GEN Z

**+75%**

MILLENNIALS

**+75%**

GEN X

**+50%**

BOOMERS

This pattern points to a population managing multiple overlapping health conditions simultaneously and reinforces why depression treatment cannot be siloed from the rest of a patient's health profile.

**FOCUS** GEN Z · MENTAL MATTERS IN THEIR OWN HANDS

## Gen Z takes mental health matters *into their own hands.*

Depressed Gen Zers use CBD for mental wellness more than any other generation (70%). Combined with their 50% marijuana usage rate, Gen Z with depression is the most likely generation to turn to cannabis-derived substances as part of their health management. They're also 67% more likely than peers to use OTC weight-loss supplements, leaning toward accessible over prescribed.

### The shadow pharmacopeia snapshot

METRIC	GEN Z (Depressed)	vs. GEN Z Peers	MILLI (Depressed)	vs. MILLI Peers	GEN X (Depressed)	vs. GEN X Peers	BOOMERS (Depressed)	vs. BOOMER Peers
Marijuana use (reg + occ)	50%	+14%	48%	+9%	41%	+14%	22%	+30%
CBD for mental wellness	70%	+59%	62%	+29%	53%	+26%	44%	+69%
Rx weight-loss drugs	6%	+50%	9%	+80%	12%	+72%	13%	+117%
OTC weight-loss supplements	5%	+67%	7%	+14%	7%	+75%	6%	+50%

## Depressed Boomers significantly outpace their peers on marijuana and CBD. They're also *assembling their own treatment stacks.*

Boomers are 13% *less likely* than their peers to exercise regularly (39% vs. 45%), yet 117% as likely to use prescription weight-loss medication (13% vs. 6%) and 69% more likely than their peers to use CBD for mental wellness.

#### THE BOOMER SURPRISE

The depression gap is widest in the generation where it's least expected and least discussed. Boomers with depression show the most extreme relative gaps vs. their peers in several categories: They're **117% more likely** to use Rx weight-loss drugs than their peers. They regularly use marijuana (**30% more** than their peers). They're **69% more likely** to use CBD for mental wellness than their peers. And **50%** more likely to turn to OTC weight-loss supplements.

Where Gen Z is lacing up their sneakers, Boomers are reaching for pharmaceutical and digital tools. This underscores the fact that even *the impulse to self-manage looks radically different across generations.*

**CLOSING** THE WEIGHT-DEPRESSION CONNECTION

## A signal, not *non-compliance*.

A population turning to cannabis for mental wellness, using weight-loss medications at dramatically higher rates, and assembling their own various treatment combinations might be viewed as non-compliant. But this is a signal that tells us that prescribed treatments are not addressing the full picture of what these individuals are experiencing.

## Americans with depression are not just using these substances recreationally. They are building treatment regimens *outside the clinical system*.

The connection between depression, weight and medication use is particularly telling. There's also a psychological dimension to the weight-depression connection that the data captures but can't fully explain.

Depression changes how people perceive their own bodies, which is illustrated by the fact that the depressed cohort is significantly more likely to identify as overweight across every generation. Whether that reflects physical reality or the distorted self-perception that depression creates, the result is the same: a population reaching for weight-loss medications to solve a problem that may be as much psychological as physical.

Compounding this is the fact that weight gain is a common side effect of many widely prescribed antidepressants. A patient who already struggles with their weight — or their perception of it — can be prescribed a medication that makes that struggle worse. This is precisely where personalized treatment selection matters most: matching patients to medications that address their depression without introducing side effects that create new problems.

### A NOTE ON GLP-1S

The rapid adoption of GLP-1 medications adds another dimension to watch. As drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy become more widely prescribed, emerging research suggests they may have effects on mood and mental health beyond weight management. For a population already using weight-loss medications at 71% to 116% the rate of their peers, understanding how GLP-1s interact with depression and antidepressants will be one of the most important clinical questions of the next several years.

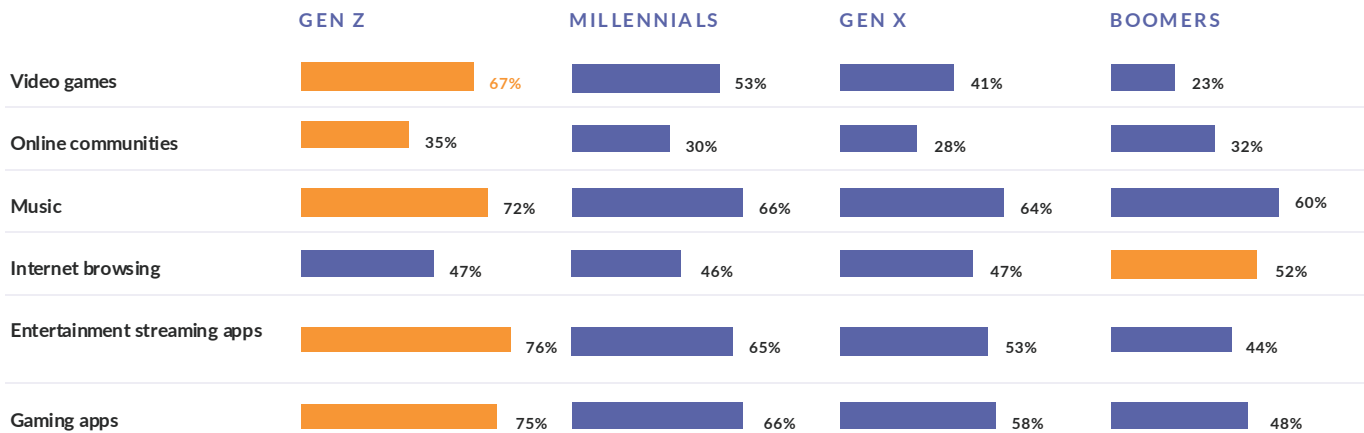
# Screens as *medicine*.

Beyond substances, there's a pronounced pattern of digital and analog “coping stacks” among Americans with depression. They don't just engage with screens and in solitary hobbies more than their peers, they use these things differently and exhibit distinct usage patterns by age.

## CHART 08 DIGITAL IMMERSION

## Two-thirds of Gen Z with depression play video games. They're also 64% more likely to turn to online communities.

Depression cohort rates only, by generation.



Survey questions: What do you do in your LEISURE time? / Which types of apps do you use on your Smartphone or Tablet?

## SNAPSHOT GEN Z'S DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

## GEN Z IS THE MOST DIGITALLY IMMERSSED GENERATION

# 67%

of Gen Z plays video games as a primary leisure activity. This is 40% more than their peers and **191% more than Boomers with depression.**

# 66%

more likely than the average Gen Z adult to spend leisure time in online communities. This is the highest of any generation.

# 76%

Of depressed Gen Zers have entertainment streaming apps on their phone, compared to 65% of Millennials, 53% of Gen X and 44% of Boomers.

But the biggest behavioral gap between depressed and non-depressed Gen Z isn't screens. *It's crafting.*

## CHART 9 THE LEISURE-ACTIVITY SIGNATURE

## Depressed people gravitate toward solitary, creative activities, and away from *physical, competitive ones*.

Thirty-three percent (33%) of Gen Z with depression report crafting as a hobby. That's 83% more than their peers and the single largest gap between depressed adults and their peers across all leisure activities in the dataset.

More Than Peers ■ Less Than Peers ■

### How much depressed Gen Zers participate in analog activities vs. their non-depressed peers.

0% = peer baseline



Survey question: What do you do in your LEISURE time? Gap shown is the Gen Z depression cohort vs. the Gen Z non-depressed baseline.

### Crafting is not just a Gen Z phenomenon.

Millennials with depression craft 80% more than their peers, and depressed Gen Xers craft 50% more than theirs.

#### ALONE, AT THEIR OWN PACE, WITH THEIR HANDS.

Across the full range of leisure activities measured, a clear behavioral signature emerges: The activities that depressed adults gravitate toward most—crafting, collecting, photography, reading, gardening—all offer control, creative expression and solitude. The activities they gravitate toward least—team sports and exercise—are competitive, social and physical.

This pattern holds across every generation, though it's strongest among younger adults.

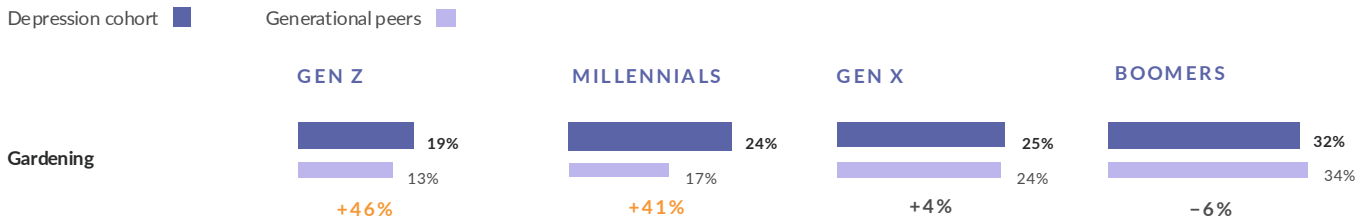
This doesn't contradict the finding that Gen Zers with depression exercise more than their peers. They do, but they're not exercising for fun. They're exercising as a **health intervention**.

CHART 10 THE CREATIVE PATTERN, IN DETAIL

# Gardening is a normal activity for older adults, but for younger adults, it's *a distinctive behavioral choice*.

The over-index is dramatic among the young and vanishes with age.

GARDENING · % WHO GARDEN IN LEISURE TIME, BY GENERATION



## Solitary activities that carry the *same creative signature*.

<p><b>+63%</b></p> <p><b>Photography &amp; video</b></p> <p>Gen Z with depression is 63% more likely to take photos or videos than their peers (26% vs 16%).</p>	<p><b>+46%</b></p> <p><b>Gardening</b></p> <p>Gen Zers with depression garden 46% more than their peers; depressed Millennials 41% more. For Gen X and Boomers the gap disappears entirely.</p>	<p><b>+73%</b></p> <p><b>Collecting</b></p> <p>Gen Z is 73% more likely than peers to collect antiques or memorabilia (19% vs 11%). Solitary, tactile and self-directed—the same profile as crafting.</p>	<p><b>+55%</b></p> <p><b>Reading</b></p> <p>Depressed Gen Zers are 55% more likely to read books as a leisure activity than their peers.</p>
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**THE STEREOTYPE OF GEN Z GLUED TO SCREENS MISSES HALF THE PICTURE**

The combination of digital immersion (video games 67%, online communities 35%) and analog creativity (crafting 33%, reading 45%, photography 26%, gardening 19%) shows Gen Z with depression engaging in both digital and hands-on activities at rates far above their peers. **Their leisure profile is distinctly different from the rest of their generation.**

**THE PATTERN IS UNMISTAKABLE**

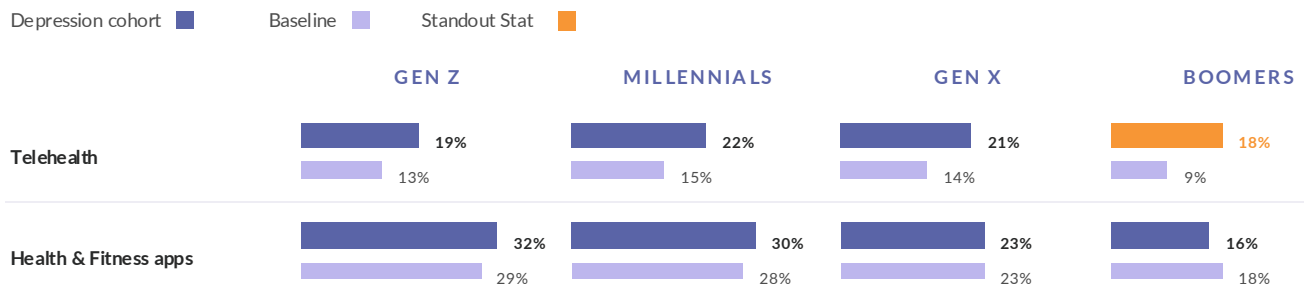
Whether these activities serve as coping mechanisms, creative outlets, or simply reflect a population whose relationship with leisure has been reshaped by their mental health, the signal is clear: Americans with depression don't just spend more time on screens. **They spend more time making things, collecting things, reading and growing things, and less time competing.**

## Boomers are the unexpected generation engaging in *digital health-seeking*.

For Boomers, the digital pattern looks different but is equally pronounced. They're about 52% more likely to use entertainment streaming apps and 30% more likely to browse the internet than their peers. They're 52% more likely to turn to online communities, which is nearly the same relative gap as Gen Z. This finding defies the assumption that digital social connection is a young person's behavior.

### CHART 11 TELEHEALTH + HEALTH APPS

## Boomers with depression are twice as likely to use telehealth *as their peers*.



Survey questions: What do you use Video Conferencing for? / Which types of apps do you use?

Boomers defy the "digital divide" assumption when it comes to seeking digital health access. Boomers with depression are **twice as likely to use telehealth** than their peers. This is the strongest telehealth over-index of any generation by a wide margin.

#### THE WAYS PEOPLE COPE GIVES US A MAP OF THEIR NEEDS

There's a meaningful distinction between using screens to cope and using screens to seek help, but the data shows the same person is often doing both. Someone gaming for hours in the evening may also be researching supplements at midnight and booking a telehealth appointment at 2 a.m. These aren't contradictory behaviors and they provide a map of unmet needs.

But the analog data is the most surprising. A generation that's supposedly glued to their phones is also crafting at nearly twice the rate of their peers, reading books 60% more, and picking up photography and gardening. These aren't distractions, they're attempts at regulation.

When treatment is well-matched to an individual's neurobiology, the frantic quality of this digital and analog search starts to quiet. Not because these activities are problems to be solved, but because the person has found what actually works.

# Where depressed Americans get their health information, and who's influencing *treatment decisions*.

People with depression are significantly more media-influenced when making medicine purchases than the general population, across every channel measured. But the generational data reveals a counter-intuitive hierarchy of influence.

**CHART 12** WHAT INFLUENCES MEDICINE PURCHASES?

## Depressed Americans are more susceptible to recommendations *than their peers across every channel.*

% of generation reporting that channel influences their medicine purchases. Depression cohort vs. baseline.

### What influences medicine purchases?

	GEN Z	MILLENNIALS	GEN X	BOOMERS
Word of mouth	19% vs 13% · +46%	18% vs 14%	17% vs 14%	16% vs 12%
Social media	16% vs 12%	14% vs 12%	14% vs 10%	10% vs 6% · +67%
Mobile video	11% vs 8%	10% vs 8%	8% vs 7%	7% vs 4% · +75%
Product reviews	12% vs 9%	14% vs 11%	14% vs 11%	16% vs 11% · +54%
Internet	24% vs 19%	26% vs 21%	22% vs 19%	19% vs 13% · +46%
TV / Streaming	14% vs 10%	14% vs 12%	17% vs 14%	18% vs 13% · +38%

Survey question: Please tell us which of the following media influences your MEDICINE purchases.

**Gen Z trusts word of mouth more than influencers.** When it comes to medicine purchases specifically, Gen Z with depression over-indexes most heavily on word-of-mouth recommendations (19% vs. 13% of their peers), followed by mobile video (11% vs. 8%) and social media (16% vs. 12%). By contrast, only 8% of depressed Gen Zers say they look to celebrity influencers (vs. 7% of their peers).

#### BOOMERS: THE MOST MEDIA-INFLUENCED GENERATION

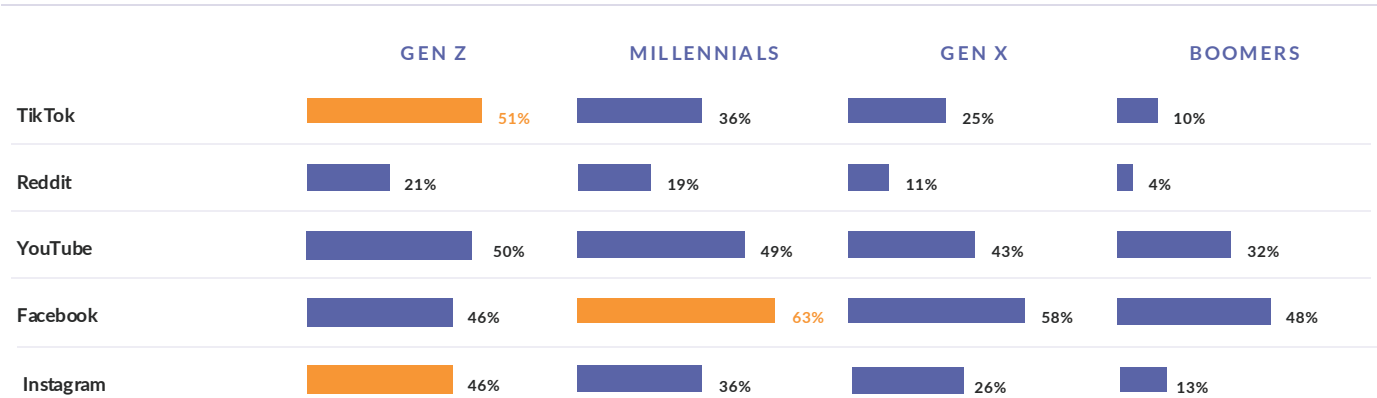
The generation assumed to be least susceptible to media influence on health decisions is actually the most susceptible when depression is a factor. Across nearly every media channel, Boomers with depression are more likely than their peers to say these channels influence medicine purchases: social media (67% more likely), mobile video (75%), product reviews (54%), internet (46%) and TV/streaming (38%).

This pattern is consistent with what this report reveals about Boomers and digital engagement: when depression is present, this generation's relationship with media shifts dramatically relative to the generation at large.

**CHART 13** NEWS PLATFORMS BY GENERATION

## Where adults with depression *get their news*.

The depression cohort's news consumption patterns reveal which platforms are shaping this population's worldview and, by extension, the environments in which they encounter health information.



Survey question: Which of the following social media platforms do you regularly get your news from?

- Facebook is the dominant social media news source for depressed adult Millennials (63%) and Gen X (58%).
- For Gen Z, TikTok (51%), YouTube (50%) and Instagram (46%) run nearly neck and neck as their primary news platforms
- Reddit is a smaller but notable source for younger generations, with 21% of Gen Z and 19% of Millennials with depression getting news there.
- For Boomers, Facebook (48%) is the clear leader, followed by YouTube (32%). TikTok and Reddit barely register at 10% and 4%.

### THE IMPLICATION FOR HEALTH INFORMATION IS INDIRECT BUT SIGNIFICANT

When someone these are platforms where health content—including supplement recommendations, medication experiences and wellness advice—circulates widely alongside news and entertainment.

The line between news consumption and health decision-making on these platforms is increasingly blurred, particularly for younger generations where peer-generated content dominates the feed.

## AI as an emerging *influence*.

Adults with depression are already adopting AI in their day-to-day lives. Some are already comfortable using agentic AI assistants for healthcare matters and outsourcing complex decisions to technology.

For a cohort that is already assembling its own treatment stacks based on information from fragmented sources, such as Reddit threads, TikTok videos and peer conversations, AI represents the next logical step: a tool that could synthesize information and recommend action.

→ The full findings around AI's emerging role in depression treatment exploration and decision-making will be released in [Part II of this research series](#).

### APPROXIMATELY 1 IN 4 DEPRESSED ADULTS SEARCH ONLINE FOR MEDICAL INFORMATION

27%

GEN Z

28%

MILLENNIALS

27%

GEN X

25%

BOOMERS

While the raw rates are similar, Boomers with depression are searching *67% more than their peers*.

This is the largest gap of any generation.

#### THE INFORMATION GAP IS AS DANGEROUS AS THE TREATMENT GAP

When someone with depression is making medication decisions based on a Reddit thread or a TikTok video, they're not necessarily getting bad information. They're getting information that has no relationship to their individual neurobiology. A supplement that worked for one person may do nothing for another, or worse.

This data tells us that expert-guided, personalized treatment selection needs to meet people where they already are. The 44% of Gen Z already using generative AI, the Boomers researching medical information online — these are people actively seeking answers. The healthcare system's job is to make sure the answers they find are matched to their biology, not to someone else's anecdotes.

## CONCLUSION

# The future of depression treatment starts with recognizing every brain *is different.*

The data in this report paints a portrait of a population that has already largely rejected one-size-fits-all depression treatment. And those that are going it alone, are doing it without professional guidance.

Across generations, Americans with depression are building their own treatment stacks by assembling combinations of cannabis, CBD, weight-management drugs, digital health tools and online research to fill in gaps that their prescribed treatment — or lack thereof — doesn't address.

- Gen Z is doing it with marijuana and mental-wellness CBD.
- Boomers are doing it with prescription weight-loss drugs and telehealth.
- Every generation is doing it through screens.
- And they're doing it on less. Adults with depression earn 12–23% less than their peers, are 40% more likely to have no credit card, and nearly half are on government insurance. This means that every failed prescription carries a cost the patient and the system can least afford to absorb.

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This isn't a matter of non-compliance or patient failure. It's the natural consequence of a system that treats 3,737 different brains as if they're *interchangeable.*

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The future of depression treatment is personalized. It starts with understanding that each individual's neurobiology is unique, and that the right antidepressant for one person may be the wrong one for another. The science to make this possible exists now. The question is whether the healthcare system will catch up to what patients already know.

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BY THE NUMBERS

# A single-page recap, *one per section.*

52%

of the depressed adults in this study are **Gen Z + Millennials**.

50%

of depressed **Gen Zers** use marijuana.

70%

of depressed **Gen Z CBD users** use it for mental wellness.

+117%

**Depressed Boomers** are using Rx weight-loss drugs more than 2x as much as their Boomer peers.

+100%

How much more **Boomers** use telehealth vs. their peers.

+160%

How much more likely **depressed Millennials** are to be disabled vs. their peers.

## Depression at an *inflection point.*

The data in this report reflects a population that knows it's depressed and is willing to do something about it. But often, it's doing so unguided.

The science of matching antidepressant treatments to individuals' neurobiology is no longer theoretical. It's here.

What this report documents is the cost of not using it: a population left to build their own treatment stacks from cannabis, supplements, weight-loss drugs and midnight Google searches.

## ABOUT NEUROKAIRE

# The key to *mental health*.

NeuroKaire is building the personalized future of depression treatment, using individual neurobiology to match patients to the antidepressant most likely to work for them, before they take the first pill.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

"The Self-Medication Generation" is the first installment of NeuroKaire's Depression in America research series, drawing on an independent national survey fielded by Prosper Insights & Analytics in January–February 2026 (n = 18,341 U.S. adults; depression cohort n = 3,737).

Forthcoming reports will examine AI and decision-making in mental healthcare; comorbidities and gender differences in depression.

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