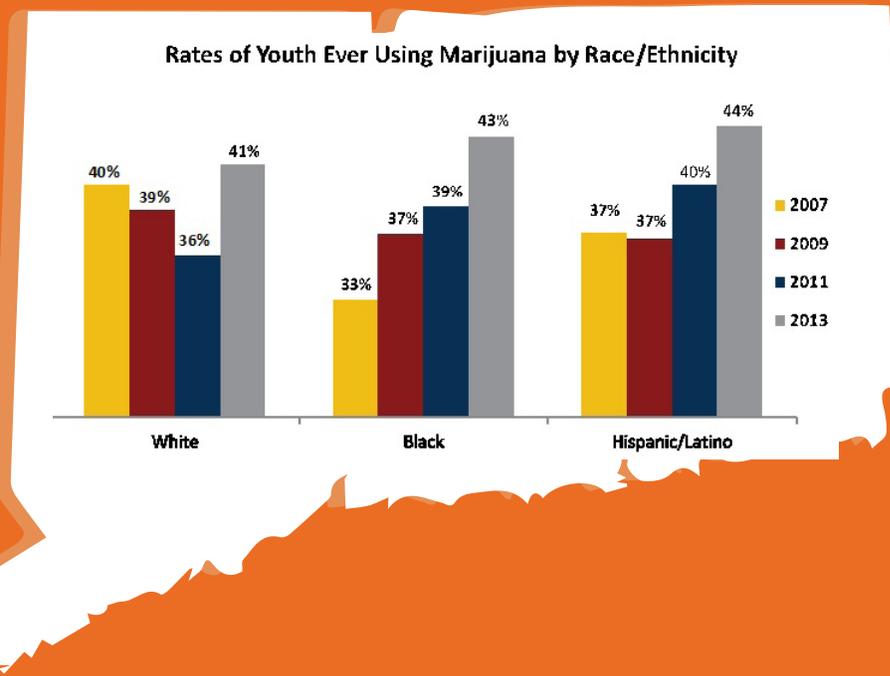


Position Statement

Opposing the Legalization of Marijuana



Executive Summary

As advocates for safe, successful and drug-free children in Connecticut for over 25 years, The Governor's Prevention Partnership opposes the legalization of recreational marijuana. While sale of marijuana to people under 21 is not under debate, legalizing recreational use by adults will likely lead to increased access to and use of marijuana by our young people. This paper summarizes The Partnership's concerns on the potential harms and societal costs to Connecticut's young people if recreational marijuana is legalized.

In 2013, 42% of Connecticut high school students report ever having used marijuana.

(Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2013)

We have the following concerns:

- Increased availability and acceptability of marijuana would lead to increased use by adolescents.
- Marijuana is known to have a significant negative impact on the physical and mental health, development, and overall well-being of youth.
- Increased use of marijuana, including use by youth, leads to higher public health and financial costs for society, far outweighing any anticipated financial gains for the state.

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Increased availability and acceptability of marijuana would likely lead to increased use by adolescents.

Scientific research shows us that when “perception of harm” of a particular substance is reduced, use among adolescents goes up.¹ Lowered youth perception of harm about marijuana is already occurring, and may be due to a number of factors, including:

- lax attitudes at home or in the community,
- perception by youth that everyone else is using, and
- the ongoing public debates about medical marijuana, decriminalization of possession and legalization of marijuana for recreational use by adults.

The rates of marijuana have increased in many sub-populations of Connecticut youth and now exceed national averages. While marijuana usage in youth overall was decreasing up until 5 years ago, rates have again increased in recent years, with 7% now reporting use of marijuana by age 12. Urban youth are affected at even higher rates-- more than 43% of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino youth report having used marijuana. As rates of marijuana use continue to climb in our state.

Teens in Connecticut report being able to easily obtain alcohol from their parents, from friends who purchase it legally, and from retail stores. They would most likely obtain marijuana in a similar manner were it legalized for adult use. In Colorado, where recreational use of marijuana is legal, 30% of teens say they obtained marijuana from their parents and 39% say they obtain it from a friend who purchased it legally.² Colorado officials report an 8% spike in use of marijuana by teens the year after legalization took place.³ Although researchers and policymakers have been cautious to not overstate the causal effects of legalization on youth use until sufficient data is collected and analyzed, most experts agree that there is a definite correlation.

Making marijuana more available to adults – even if restrictions are in place – will increase the access for teens.

*–Seth D. Ammerman, MD
American Academy of Pediatrics
Subcommittee on Substance Abuse*

Marijuana is known to have a significant negative impact on the physical and mental health, development and overall well-being of youth.

Despite the ever decreasing perceptions of harm, marijuana is not a benign drug. Studies reveal that marijuana potency has almost tripled over the past 20 years, creating significant negative consequences to young people who use. All of these negative effects result in added costs to society, including:

- **Poor life outcomes.** Early and continuous use of marijuana significantly increases risk of not completing high school, not enrolling or completing college, low educational achievement, lower income, unemployment and welfare dependence as an adult, and reduction in IQ in middle adulthood.⁴
- **Effects on memory, learning and mental health.** There are many studies that indicate the negative impact of marijuana on the developing brain, including increased impulsivity, decreased self-control and difficulty with decision making.⁵ Other studies have indicated that regular marijuana use by adolescents is associated with impaired learning, memory, reading and math achievement. Marijuana has been shown to have a negative impact on the mental health of adolescents and young adults and its use is linked to heightened symptoms of depression.⁶

- **Gateway to other drugs and addiction.** Even occasional use of marijuana has been correlated to future high-risk use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, including heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine. Many young people in Connecticut are entering treatment because of addiction to or dependency on marijuana. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 9% of people who use marijuana will become dependent on it. That number increases to 17% for people who start using in adolescence, and 25-50% for daily users⁷
- **Other negative outcomes.** There are a variety of other negative outcomes for young people who use marijuana, including results of driving under the influence. In Connecticut, youth are already reporting risky behavior when it comes to drinking and driving. The most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows that 9.4% of Connecticut youth report drinking and driving, 22.2% report riding in the car with a driver who has been drinking⁸, and similar risky behavior would likely increase as youth rates of marijuana use rise. The Denver Police Department saw a 100% increase in the number of DUI's involving marijuana from 2013 to 2014 after legalization took place among people of driving age⁹ and, again, while we want to be cautious in drawing conclusions, we do anticipate seeing more young people involved in drugged driving incidents.

Marijuana is not a benign drug and studies reveal that marijuana potency has almost tripled over the past 20 years, creating significant negative consequences to young people who use.

Increased use of marijuana, including use by youth, leads to higher public health and financial costs for society, far outweighing any anticipated financial gains for the state.

It will take years of data collection and analysis to determine whether the revenue generated by the recreational marijuana industry in Colorado is having a positive or negative impact on the state's economy. However, the director of the Colorado Governor's Office of Marijuana Coordination stated that most revenue generated from legal marijuana sales is being used to regulate the industry. He goes on to say: "You do not legalize for taxation. It is a myth. The big red herring of legalization is that the tax revenue will solve a bunch of fiscal crises, but it won't."¹⁰

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Because marijuana legalization could potentially increase use and related harms, any tax revenue gained may be quickly offset by societal costs, including health care and substance abuse treatment expenses, poor academic performance, and unemployment. Addictive substances such as alcohol and tobacco, which are regulated and taxed, already result in much higher societal costs than the revenue they generate. The cost to society of alcohol alone is estimated to be more than 15

times the revenue gained by its taxation. Another study shows that for every \$1 in alcohol and tobacco tax revenues, society loses \$10 in societal costs from accidents, school dropout and poor health outcomes.¹¹

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Many young people and their families have already been harmed by marijuana in Connecticut, and the potential to derail more of our youth will increase should recreational use of marijuana be legalized in Connecticut.

The Governor's Prevention Partnership urges lawmakers and policymakers to consider the needs and best interests of our young people in the debate to legalize recreational use of marijuana in our state.

END NOTES

- ¹ Joffe, A. & Yancy, W. S., (2004). Legalization of Marijuana: Potential Impact on Youth. *Pediatrics*, 113(6), e632-e638.
- ^{2,3,9,10} Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (2015). *The Legalization of Marijuana in Colorado: The Impact*.
- ⁴ Vermont Department of Public Health (2016). *Health Impact Assessment: Marijuana Regulation in Vermont*. http://healthvermont.gov/pubs/healthassessments/documents/HIA_marijuana_regulation_in_vermont_201601.pdf
- ⁵ Dahlgren, M. K., Gruber S. A., Lukas, S. E., & Sagar, K. A. (2014). Worth the wait: effects of age of onset of marijuana use on white matter and impulsivity. *Psychopharmacology*, 231, 1455-1465. DOI 10.1007/s00213-013-3326-z
- ⁶ McQueeney, T., Medina, K. L., Nagel, B. J., Park, A., & Tapert, S. F. (2007). Depressive symptoms in adolescents: associations with white matter volume and marijuana use. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 48(6), 592-600. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.2007.01728.x
- ⁷ National Institute on Drug Abuse (2015). *Is Marijuana Addictive?* <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/marijuana-addictive>
- ⁸ Connecticut Department of Public Health, 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – Connecticut; Youth Risk Behavior Survey Component of the Connecticut School Health Survey.
- ¹¹ Bouchery, E.E., Harwood, H. J., Sacks, J. J., Simon, C. J., Brewer, R. D., (2011) Economic Costs of Excessive Alcohol Consumption in the U.S., 2006. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 41(5), 516-524, DOI: 10.1016/j.amepre.2011.06.045

RESOURCES

The Governor's Prevention Partnership <http://www.PreventionWorksCT.org>

The Partnership's Research Brief on Marijuana and Youth https://preventionworksctorg.presencehost.net/file_download/4966e1b0-dd16-44b6-a024-7e51910b7903

National Institute on Drug Abuse – Marijuana Overview <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana>

Office of National Drug Control Policy – Marijuana <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/marijuana>

Colorado's Department of Public Health's Resources on Marijuana, including the Good to Know Youth Prevention Campaign <https://www.colorado.gov/marijuana>

ABOUT US

Created in 1989, The Governor's Prevention Partnership is a not-for-profit partnership between state government and business leaders with a mission to keep Connecticut's youth safe, successful and drug-free. The Partnership is the state affiliate of Partnership for Drug-Free Kids. Co-chaired by Governor Dannel Malloy and a business leader, the organization focuses on positive school climate, mentoring, and the prevention of underage drinking and substance abuse. The Partnership also responds to emerging threats facing our youth and raising awareness through the media.

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