Recreational Marijuana

Items to Consider

Marijuana, which can also be called cannabis, weed, pot, or dope, refers to the dried flowers, leaves, stems, and seeds of the cannabis plant. The cannabis plant contains more than 100 compounds (or cannabinoids). These compounds include tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which is impairing or mind-altering, as well as other active compounds, such as cannabidiol (CBD). CBD is not impairing, meaning it does not cause a “high”, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Marijuana Facts:

The Centers for Disease Control has studied marijuana, and its impacts on public health.

- Marijuana is the most commonly used federally illegal drug in the United States; 48.2 million people, or about 18% of Americans, used it at least once in 2019.

- Recent research estimated that approximately 3 in 10 people who use marijuana have marijuana use disorder. For people who begin using marijuana before age 18, the risk of developing marijuana use disorder is even greater.

- Marijuana use directly affects the brain, specifically the parts of the brain responsible for memory, learning, attention, decision-making, coordination, emotion, and reaction time. Infants, children, and teens (who still have developing brains) are especially susceptible to the adverse effects of marijuana and THC.

- Long-term or frequent marijuana use has been linked to increased risk of psychosis or schizophrenia in some users.

- Using marijuana during pregnancy may increase the person’s risk for pregnancy complications. Pregnant and breastfeeding persons should avoid marijuana.

- Marijuana can make the heartbeat faster and can elevate blood pressure immediately after use. It may also lead to increased risk of stroke, heart disease, and other vascular diseases.
Marijuana use has been linked to social anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia (a type of mental illness where people might see or hear things that aren’t there), but scientists don’t yet fully understand the relationships between these mental health disorders and marijuana use.

Unintentional Poisoning---Edibles, or food and drink products infused with marijuana, have some different risks than smoked marijuana, including a greater risk of poisoning. Children can mistake edibles for regular food or candy. Consuming marijuana can make children very sick. Since marijuana use has been legalized in some states, unintentional poisonings in children have increased, with some instances requiring emergency medical care.

Baby’s Health and Development:

- Marijuana use during pregnancy may cause fetal growth restriction, premature birth, stillbirth, and problems with brain development, resulting in hyperactivity and poor cognitive function. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and other chemicals from marijuana can also be passed from a mother to her baby through breast milk, further impacting a child’s healthy development.

Impacts on Driving:

States that have legalized marijuana, have seen the impact of impaired driving.

- Marijuana, like alcohol, negatively affects several skills required for safe driving. It can slow reaction time and ability to make decisions.
- Marijuana can impair coordination and distort perception when driving.
- The use of multiple substances (such as marijuana and alcohol) at the same time can increase impairment.
- Some studies have shown an association between marijuana use and car crashes.
- Since recreational marijuana was legalized, traffic deaths where drivers tested positive for marijuana increased 138% while all Colorado traffic deaths increased 29%.
• Since recreational marijuana was legalized, traffic deaths involving drivers who tested positive for marijuana more than doubled from 55 in 2013 to 131 people killed in 2020.

• Since recreational marijuana was legalized, the percentage of all Colorado traffic deaths involving drivers who tested positive for marijuana increased from 11% in 2013 to 20% in 2020.

**Commercialization Deliver Social Justice:**

• According to “Lessons Learned, after 4 years of MJ Legalization (paper 2016) Smart Approach to Marijuana (SAM)” on the surface, legalizing marijuana might sound like a good way to address issues of systemic injustice. People of color are almost 6 times more likely to be arrested for all drugs, including marijuana, than whites.

• Drug and narcotics crime in Denver has increased at about 11% per year since marijuana legalization. While it is unclear if legalization has caused this increase, it does contradict promises of pro-legalization advocates that legalization would reduce such crime rates.

• Indeed, Denver’s overall crime rate has risen, as well as rates of serious crimes like murder, motor vehicle theft, aggravated assault, and burglaries. Many marijuana-related offenses, such as public marijuana consumption, have also increased as use has trended upward.

**Impacts on Employment:**

States that have legalized marijuana have seen impacts on employment:

• According to a study reported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, employees who tested positive for marijuana had 55% more industrial accidents, 85% more injuries and 75% greater absenteeism compared to those who tested negative.
Five main prongs to ‘combat’ the negative impacts of legalization:

1. Require zoning restrictions (local ordinances regarding where shops can be located, density/number of shops allowed in municipalities).
2. Require marketing restrictions (what ages can be targeted, what kinds of images can be used, what kinds of claims can be made). Those who are marketing the sale of Marijuana should be required to uphold standards in various ‘truth in advertising’ laws and in the regulations surrounding the medicinal/healing claims that can be made.
3. Emphasize concurrent areas of restriction (employment impacts, job restrictions regarding use of machinery or access to certain work).
4. Emphasize potency restriction measures (if it does become legal, work on minimizing the amount of THC that is legal).
5. Big Tobacco” has been justly criticized for employing an unethical marketing strategy that relied on cultivating lifelong addicted customers to ensure ongoing profits. A major part of this strategy focused on making tobacco use attractive to youth. Indications from states that have legalized marijuana for adult use is that “Big Marijuana” is employing the same playbook. (PACDAA position paper March 2022).

Sources:

- Food and Drug Administration
- Centers for Disease Control
- National Institute on Drug Addiction
- National Center for Biotechnology Information
- Smart Approach to Marijuana (SAM) Lessons Learned, after 4 years of MJ Legalization (paper 2016)
- PACDAA position paper March 2022
Other links:

- PA Department of Health oversees the MJ cards, doctors, and dispensaries in PA (link below):

  https://www.pa.gov/guides/pennsylvania-medical-marijuana-program/

- County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP’s) Medical Marijuana Task Force page (link below):

  https://www.pacounties.org/GR/Pages/MedicalMarijuanaTaskForce.aspx

- Permitting pot is one thing; promoting its use is another.

  https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/01/14/is-marijuana-as-safe-as-we-think
  https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8672945/
  https://www.cdc.gov/marijuana/index.htm