

Recreational Marijuana Legalization Why the Faith Community Should Speak Out

Prevent Youth Marijuana Use. States that have legalized marijuana for recreational use have higher youth use rates than the national average.

A national study of 6,116 high school seniors, prior to legalization of recreational use in any state, found that 10 percent of nonusers said they would try marijuana if the drug were legal. Significantly, this included large subgroups of students normally considered low risk for drug experimentation, including non-cigarette smokers, those with strong religious affiliation, and those with peers who frown upon drug use. Among high school seniors already using marijuana, 18 percent said they would use more under legalization (Palamar et al., 2015).

1. *Keep youth safe from marijuana use.*

Youth marijuana use increases the likelihood of developing a substance use disorder and is proven to negatively affect one's mental health, emotional health, and physical health. People who begin using marijuana before age 18 are four to seven times more likely than adults to develop a marijuana use disorder (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2019).

2. *Help youth reach their fullest potential.*

Research associates youth marijuana use with poorer academic performance, athletic performance, and essential cognitive functions, such as memory, learning, and attention. 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. Youth who use marijuana are less likely to finish high school, succeed academically, or earn a college degree, compared with their peers who do not use marijuana (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2019). Compared to those who do not use marijuana, frequent users report the following: lower life satisfaction, poorer mental health, poorer physical health, and poorer educational outcomes (Hines et al., 2020 & National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2020).

Why is Today's Marijuana a Concern?

1. *The marijuana available today has a much higher THC potency.*

The THC concentration (psychoactive ingredient, what gets a person "high") in commonly cultivated marijuana plants has risen from 4 percent in 1995 to 12 percent in 2014. Some samples of extracts have an 80 – 90 percent THC level (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Higher doses of THC are associated with a significant increase in the frequency of cannabis use and poor mental health outcomes such as anxiety, agitation, paranoia, and psychosis (Hines et al., 2020 & US Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Higher THC levels may result in a greater risk for addiction with regular exposure to high doses (Hines et al., 2020 & National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2019).

2. *Youth trends in marijuana may lead to higher THC consumption.*

The percentage of twelfth-grade students smoking marijuana have decreased while vaping and edible consumption have increased (Patrick et al., 2020). THC in edible marijuana takes time to absorb and produce effects, increasing the risk of unintentional overdose, as well as accidental ingestion by children and adolescents (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). According to the 2019 *Monitoring the Future* report, thirty-day use of vaping marijuana nearly doubled among twelfth-grade students in 2018, from 7.5 percent to 14 percent (Johnston et al., 2020). Vaping marijuana produces significantly greater physiological and psychological effects compared to traditional smoking methods at the same THC levels, raising concerns about potential health effects (Meich et al., 2020).

Don't be Misled. Recreational marijuana is NOT the solution to our problems.

Recreational legalization of marijuana is a move to commercialize marijuana for profit. Emerging studies show that the major promises of recreational legalization are not true

1. *Illicit Market*

Legalization has led to greater black-market activity than ever before (Fuller, T., 2019).

2. *Criminal Justice*

Even though Black and white people use marijuana at similar rates, a Black person is almost four times as likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than a white person (American Civil Liberties Union, 2020). We do not need more access to drugs, we need criminal justice reform. Recreational marijuana legalization does not equate to criminal justice reform.

3. *Budgetary Impacts*

Funds generated from marijuana tax revenue are not enough to fix budget shortfalls. In Colorado, for every \$1 of tax revenue, the state spends \$4.50 counteracting legalization's effects. (Economic and Social Costs of Legalized Marijuana [Study]. 2018, November 15). This is similar to what we see with alcohol and tobacco, the revenues are not sufficient to outweigh societal costs.

4. *Cure to the Opiate Epidemic*

A four-year prospective study followed medical marijuana patients with a dual opioid prescription and found that marijuana use had no positive impact on opioid use or reduced prescribing. Further, they found that cannabis users were more likely to rate cannabis as means of effective pain relief; however, other self-reported pain measures indicated the opposite. Users reported greater pain severity (The Lancet Journal, 2018).

5. *Public Safety*

Emerging studies on states that have recreational legalized have seen increases in drugged driving. Several studies have shown that drivers with THC in their blood were roughly twice as likely to be responsible for a deadly crash or be killed than drivers who had not used drugs or alcohol (Wilson FA, Stimpson JP).

Recreational marijuana legalization is not inevitable. How can you help protect our youth and communities?

1. **Stay informed with the latest research, studies, and trends.** There is a substantial body of research demonstrating the negative health and safety risks of youth marijuana use and the negative impacts of recreational legalization on communities.
2. **Educate others.** Share information learned with others.
3. **Oppose the legalization of recreational marijuana use.** As a faith community, parents, and grandparents, we want our young people to be healthy and thrive. Therefore, it is our obligation to protect and support our young people in reaching their fullest potential. It is also our responsibility to support healthy communities. Increased drug access and availability will not help us achieve our goals.