

# Marijuana: Why You Should be Concerned

## Marijuana affects all aspects of life

*Increased potency increases the harmful effects*

### Marijuana today is much stronger

- The average marijuana leaves and buds available today contain 15% THC – five times stronger than the marijuana available in the 1980s. Over that same period, the THC extracts known as hash, hash oil, and dabs have also become much stronger. Potencies average 40%, but range from 15% to over 90% THC. Concentrates and edibles made with concentrates accounted for 45% of the 2014 recreational cannabis market in Colorado<sup>1,2</sup>.

Vape pens are like e-cigarettes but contain capsules of concentrated marijuana oils. They leave no marijuana smell, making it very easy to hide them at school or in the workplace.

### Marijuana is more addictive than we realized

- 1 out of every 11 people who *try* marijuana will become dependent on it at some point in their lives. For adolescents, the rate is 1 out of 6. For near-daily users, the rate is 1 out of just 2<sup>3</sup>.
- Higher concentrations of THC increase severity of dependence<sup>4</sup> and double the risk of becoming dependent<sup>5</sup>.
- Marijuana addiction is as difficult to break as tobacco addiction. Adults seeking treatment for marijuana abuse or dependence average more than 10 years of near-daily use and more than six serious attempts at quitting. Most perceive themselves as unable to stop, and most experience a withdrawal syndrome. One-year abstinence rates for adults under the most successful treatments ranged from 19% to 29%. For adolescents, abstinence rates ranged from 17% to 34%<sup>6</sup>.
- 14% of current marijuana users meet the diagnostic criteria for dependence, as opposed to 6% of current alcohol users. On a per-user basis, significantly more marijuana users than alcohol users visit the ER due to their use and also self-refer for addiction treatment. Also on a per-user basis, more marijuana users report being harmed by their use than do alcohol users<sup>7</sup>.

### Marijuana can cause and worsen mental health disorders

- Marijuana has been shown to cause psychosis, schizophrenia, suicide, and social anxiety disorder. It has been shown to worsen bi-polar disease and there are indications that it worsens PTSD<sup>8</sup>.
- Dr. David C. Rettew, a pediatric psychiatrist and researcher at UVM, estimated 3000 more cases of cannabis abuse and dependence and 20 more cases of psychosis in Vermont if use rates were to rise as much as they have in Colorado<sup>9</sup>.

### Marijuana use is associated with opioid use

- According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, there is moderate evidence of a statistical association between cannabis use and the development of substance dependence and/or a substance abuse disorder for substances including, alcohol, tobacco, and other illicit drugs<sup>21</sup>.
- Since the NAS report was released, a high quality, well controlled study of over 30,000 American adults demonstrated that marijuana users were more than twice as likely to move on to abuse prescription opioids<sup>22</sup>.
- Another new study found that marijuana users are more likely to quit treatment for opioid addiction<sup>23</sup>.

### Marijuana causes traffic accidents

- Marijuana use doubles the risk of being in a traffic accident<sup>10</sup>.
- People who used both marijuana and alcohol are twice as likely to use both drugs simultaneously. Simultaneous use is associated with increased frequency and quantity of alcohol use and almost doubles the odds of driving while impaired<sup>11</sup>.
- 13% of Vermonters use marijuana, while 61% drink<sup>15</sup>. Despite this ratio, 18 of Vermont's 64 traffic fatalities in 2016 involved confirmed active THC in the drivers' blood, compared to 23 fatalities that involved alcohol<sup>12</sup>.



## Marijuana threatens success in school and college

- Marijuana use increases the risk of dropping out of high school and college. It is associated with short-term memory loss and deficits in executive function and the ability to plan<sup>13</sup>.
- Long-term, persistent use has been associated with a drop in IQ. Two factors predicted the greatest drops: starting in adolescence and heavy use<sup>14</sup>.

## Marijuana affects workplace productivity and safety

- Marijuana use is associated with lowered productivity in the workplace and more absenteeism<sup>15</sup>. It is also associated with higher rates of accidents in the workplace<sup>16</sup>.

## Marijuana use rates rise when it's "normalized"

- Historically, use rates among teens and young adults have gone up when they perceive there is less risk and less disapproval from using marijuana<sup>17</sup>.
- Marijuana use among 18-25 year-olds went up in Washington, D.C. when it legalized only home-grows and possession of small amounts but not retail sales<sup>20</sup>. Adult use rates have increased significantly in all of the states where recreational marijuana has been made legal. In Colorado, retail stores didn't open until the first day of 2014, but home-grows and possession became legal on the first day of 2013. In that first legal year, Colorado's use rate rose significantly. By 2015, it had jumped from sixth in the nation to first in the nation, in all age groups, and it has remained there since<sup>15</sup>.

## Marijuana won't save the state budget

- In fiscal 2016, Colorado's total marijuana revenue for both recreational and medical marijuana was about \$134 million. This was barely 1% of Colorado's total state tax revenue<sup>18</sup>.
- The 2016 Colorado budget was \$26.8 billion. The education portion alone of Colorado's 2017 budget is \$6.3 billion<sup>19</sup>.

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