

MARIJUANA AND PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES

Maine does not need to increase access to an addictive drug that is linked to health and safety issues, and that has public health and policy concerns, especially for Maine's youth.

Despite what you may have heard, marijuana use is not harmless, especially for youth.

- Marijuana *is* addictive. About 9% people who use marijuana become addicted.ⁱ More importantly, the chance of addiction increases to 17% for those who start using as teens and to 25-50% for daily users.ⁱⁱ In 2011 marijuana was the illicit drug with the highest rate of past year dependence or abuse in the US, followed by pain relievers and cocaine.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Studies have shown an association between chronic marijuana use and increased rates of anxiety and depression.^{iv} Marijuana use can also increase the risk of schizophrenia in individuals who are genetically predisposed to it.^v
- The average level of THC (the chemical that makes people get high and which can lead to addiction) in marijuana has more than doubled since 1998.^{vi}
- Marijuana was involved in over 450,000 emergency department visits for misuse or abuse of drugs in the US in 2011.^{vii}

If you care about the health and safety of Maine youth, you need to care about youth access to marijuana.

- Although most Maine youth do not use marijuana, over 1/3 of high school students have used marijuana at least once and 22% have used within the last month. 44% of Maine high school students believe there is no or little risk of harm to people who smoke marijuana regularly, and 59% think there is no or little risk with occasional marijuana use.^{viii}
- Last year marijuana was the substance for which Maine youth most often sought treatment for addiction. Out of the 537 substance abuse treatment admissions for youth under the age of 18, 67.6% (363) listed marijuana as their primary drug leading to admission, while 21% listed alcohol.^{ix}

If you care about academic performance and the success of Maine youth, you need to care about youth marijuana use.

- Marijuana can cause distorted perceptions, impaired coordination, difficulty in thinking and problem solving, and problems with learning and memory.^x
- Compared with their nonsmoking peers, students who smoke marijuana tend to get lower grades and are twice as likely to drop out of high school.^{xi}
- Recent research based on a study of over 1000 people shows that people who started smoking marijuana as teens and continued to use it heavily for years showed an average drop of 8 IQ points by age 38.^{xii}
- Marijuana use is strongly linked to poorer outcomes later in life. One New Zealand study showed associations between increasing levels of marijuana use at ages 14-21 and higher levels of social welfare dependence, higher unemployment, and lower income and lower levels of academic degree attainment by age 25.^{xiii} A US study showed poorer outcomes for chronic marijuana users in terms of education attained, household income, and overall life satisfaction.^{xiv}

If you care about safety on Maine roads, you need to care about impaired drivers.

- Marijuana use, and its impairment of motor coordination and reaction time, doubles the risk of car crashes.^{xv}
- Cannabinoids, the drug class that includes marijuana, ranked as the number one drug found in Maine impaired driving cases (Jan 2009-Aug 2011) when a Drug Recognition Expert was called in.^{xvi}



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