Public Health Considerations for Adult Cannabis Use

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No disclosures

The findings and conclusions in this presentation are my own and do not necessarily represent the official position of any of the agencies with whom I consult.
Presentation Overview

- Policy context for adult use
- Impacts of legalization on use patterns
- Health effects in adults
- Available products
- Public health messaging challenges
- Approaches to date
- Future directions
* VT and DC have legal medical marketplaces, but no legal adult use marketplaces
^ The KS Governor passed a bill to exempt CBD oil from the definition of marijuana, effectively legalizing CBD, though no THC is allowed in the product.
What has been legalized in adult use states?

- A regulatory system for legal access
- A tax structure
- Possession for ages 21 and older
- A retail marketplace (except in VT and DC, marketplaces pending in ME and MI)
- Home grow (except in WA)
- Limited funding to public health for marijuana prevention and education work
What has legalization done to adult marijuana use?
Past month marijuana user (any) among adults, by age, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2002-2017
Age-adjusted past 30-day marijuana use among adults in Washington State, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2011-2016
Daily or almost daily marijuana use among past month marijuana users, by age, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2002-2016

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily/near daily marijuana use (20-30 days/month)</th>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.5%</td>
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<th>Weekly marijuana use (4-19 days/month)</th>
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<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.3%</td>
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<th>Monthly marijuana use (1-3 days/month)</th>
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<td>2014</td>
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<td>1.3%</td>
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- Prevalence (%)
What do we know about the health effects of cannabis use for adults?
Acute effects

- Impaired memory, learning, and attention
- Impaired motor coordination/reaction time
- In high doses, acute psychosis and paranoia
- Altered judgment, increasing likelihood of risky behaviors
Longer-term effects

- Cognitive development and related outcomes
- Cannabis Use Disorder
- Abuse/dependence on other substances
- Respiratory effects
- Pregnancy outcomes
- Mental health outcomes
Therapeutic Effects

- **Schedule I substance**
  - No currently accepted medical use in treatment (by definition).

- **Anecdotal evidence**
  - Vocal advocacy community

- **Increasing scientific evidence** for medical use of cannabis or components of cannabis plant:
  - Most promising for pain relief, nausea relief, patient-reported symptoms from MS; some evidence for sleep.
  - 3 FDA approved synthetic THC drugs (dronabinol and nabilone)
  - 1 FDA approved cannabis-derived CBD drug (and related rescheduling)
Why don’t we know more?
How has legalization changed the product landscape?
Marijuana Products and Modes of Use

- **Combusted products**
  (e.g., joints, pipes, bongs, bowls, blunts, spliffs)

- **Vaporizers**
  (e.g., electronic vaping devices using hash oil or dried flower)

- **Edibles**
  (e.g., brownies, cookies, candies)

- **Drinks**
  (e.g., elixirs, syrups, hot chocolates)

- **Dabbing**
  (e.g., using concentrates waxes)

- **Other ways**
How are people using marijuana?

Methods of marijuana use among Colorado Adults, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2015-2017
Public Health Considerations related to mode of use

- Different health risks associated with each mode
- Lacking research on individual harms
- Lacking research on comparable harms
- Limited monitoring of mode of use to date
Public Health Messaging
Challenges and Considerations
Policy is ahead of science
Cannabis isn’t like other substances.....

Tobacco

**Similarities:**
- Populations
- Mode of use/products
- Policy overlap
- Industry

**Differences:**
- No accepted medical uses for commercial tobacco
- Not impairing
- > Addiction potential
- > Morbidity and Mortality

Alcohol

**Similarities:**
- Prohibition → Legality
- Policy overlap
- Industry
- Impairing
- Addiction potential

**Differences:**
- Mode of use
- > Morbidity and Mortality

Opiates

**Similarities:**
- Medical uses
- Produced by our bodies
- Impairing
- Industry

**Differences:**
- Respiratory depression
- > Addiction potential
- > Morbidity and Mortality
Cannabis as medicine
Other challenges

- Legality and harm reduction vs. prohibition
- Barrage of advertisements
- A relatively new industry, eager to “help”
- Trusted messengers?
- Funding
Early approaches to health-related adult messaging

- Campaigns educating adults about the law
- Safe storage/edibles messages
- Drive high get a DUI campaigns
- Informational websites
Future directions for public health

- Accepting a harm reduction approach
- Obtaining and sustaining state funding for public education campaigns
- Reigning in industry advertising and messaging
- Identifying trusted messengers that have the same objectives as public health
- Crafting adult messages that don’t unintentionally increase youth use
Thank you!

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