Bureaucracy meets the bong: King County Public Health and marijuana retail legalization

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King County, Washington

- 2.1 million residents
- 39 cities
- 19 school districts
- 170 languages
2012: Retail marijuana legalization

Welcome to Washington

THE EVERGREEN STATE
Developed inter-branch team

Depts. have differing views  
Goal: Speak as one King County
Health and Human Services priorities regarding marijuana legalization

OVERVIEW

In Washington state, marijuana (also called cannabis) was legalized for medicinal use in 1998 and for recreational (non-medical) use in 2012, but remains illegal under federal law. In the context of a growing market and evolving regulatory oversight, local and regional governments have an important role to play in monitoring the impact of this policy change. King County is committed to working with partners to apply a public health lens to this issue; protect the public from unintended consequences; and prevent negative health impacts, particularly on youth. Public Health — Seattle & King County (PHSKC) and the King County Department of Community and Human Services (OCHS) lead these efforts for the County. Our shared priorities regarding marijuana legalization include the following:

1. Broaden the evidence base
2. Prevent youth use and ensure access to treatment
3. Inform pregnant and breastfeeding women about potential risks
4. Protect people from injury, poisoning and death
5. Ensure environmental health and safety
6. Promote racial equity and healthy communities

Adequate funding and effective regulatory capacity are critical to success in all of these areas. King County opposes measures that assume a local regulatory role without commensurate funding and support stable funding for regulatory oversight, enforcement, education, treatment and prevention.

DETAIL: SIX KEY PRIORITIES

Key Priorities

1. Broaden the evidence base
2. Prevent youth use and ensure access to treatment
3. Inform pregnant and breastfeeding women about potential risks
4. Protect people from injury, poisoning and death
5. Ensure environmental health and safety
6. Promote racial equity and healthy communities
Limited funding & focus leave gaps

- Funding focused on reducing 10th grade use
- Other identified priorities do not have funding or programs
Building a regional network

- Treatment
- Public health
- Community
- Behavioral health
- Health care
- Research
- CBOs
- Schools
Strategic plan 2018-2023
Why we are focused on messaging

“There's this sort of like vehement reaction against all the adults saying that like it's bad and you shouldn't do it. Like, you know, adults have kind of exaggerated the effects of marijuana to the point where teens want to exaggerate it in the other direction, and say like it's harmless, there's nothing bad about it, it can't hurt you at all, which isn't entirely true either. So there's not really a balance. I feel like there aren't a lot of people who are just very realistic about what it can and can't do.”

Teen participant from a listening session on youth marijuana prevention, 2018
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