



# Know the Facts: Marijuana Commercialization

Amy Turncliff, PhD

September 2016

# Commercialization Has Begun





# MARIJUANA: KNOW THE FACTS

*How do changes in marijuana policy impact the health and safety of our communities and our children?*

## What does the science say?

- **Marijuana can be addictive.** The earlier someone begins using marijuana, the higher their risk of addiction -- one in six users who start under age 18 become dependent; 25-50% of teen heavy users become addicted.
- **Marijuana today is not the marijuana of the 1970s.** Highly concentrated marijuana products available today range from 5 to 85% THC (the psychoactive part of marijuana). High potency marijuana, often in the form of candies, cookies, sodas, and hashish concentrates (e.g., budder, wax, honey oil, shatter), are more likely to be associated with addiction and the negative health consequences in young people seen in recent years.<sup>2</sup>
- **Marijuana use has long-term negative consequences for kids.** According to studies by the National Academy of Sciences and other organizations, marijuana use by adolescents can impair brain development, reduce academic success, impact long-term career growth, and even lower IQ. Marijuana is associated with long-term health risks, including increased susceptibility to mental health issues (e.g., paranoia, depression, suicidal thoughts, and schizophrenia) and heart attacks.<sup>3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10</sup>
- **Marijuana use/dependency is associated with addiction to other drugs.** In a prospective study, marijuana use was associated with a 6.2 times (620%) higher risk of developing any substance use disorder. The younger marijuana is used, the higher the rates of addiction to marijuana and to other drugs, including opioids.<sup>11,12</sup>





# MARIJUANA: KNOW THE FACTS

*How do changes in marijuana policy impact the health and safety of our communities and our children?*

## What do the experiences of other states tell us?

- **Where marijuana is legal, young people are more likely to use it.** Since becoming the first state to legalize, Colorado has also become the #1 state in the nation for teen marijuana use. Teen use jumped 20% in Colorado in the two years since legalization, even as that rate has declined nationally.<sup>13,14</sup>
- **Colorado saw a 29% increase in marijuana-related emergency room visits the year marijuana was legalized.** High potency edible products have also been associated with negative consequences for adults who may fail to pay attention to serving sizes, leading to overexposure to marijuana.<sup>14, 15, 16</sup>
- **Colorado has seen an increase in traffic deaths caused by operators testing positive for marijuana.** In 2014, when retail marijuana stores began operating, there was a 32% increase in traffic deaths caused by operators who tested positive for the presence of marijuana. 25-40% of OUIs in Colorado involved marijuana alone.<sup>14,16</sup>
- **Increase in accidental marijuana use by young children.** According to data from the National Poison Data System, accidental exposure to marijuana among children under 6 years old has been on the rise. Marijuana infused products such as gummy bears, candy bars and “cannabis cola” are often indistinguishable from traditional products and attractive to children, placing them at significant risk of accidental use.<sup>14,16</sup>

# Summary of Concerns About Marijuana Policy

- *“I am a family physician who is board certified in addiction medicine. I have been running trainings all over the state talking with parents and students about the impact of marijuana on the developing teenage brain. I have never seen a larger chasm between the 30 year olds and younger generation and those older than that on the perception of marijuana risks and benefits. The average adolescent and twenty-something considers marijuana to be an herbal supplement, beneficial for all health conditions. I think we are going to reflect on what happened in 2014 twenty years from now and think, “What were we thinking? We have created a generation of individuals with lower cognitive skills, higher rates of addiction, and a greater sense of lost purpose than we could have imagined”. This is a drug grown intentionally to be more potent and addictive and then processed for the strongest high possible. We are allowing Big Tobacco to become Big Marijuana and the health consequences will be enormous.” --- Dr. Ruth Potee*

***“Drug policy is all about reducing demand, and a company that has a profit motive is only going to increase demand. Having a big commercial marijuana industry runs counter to public health goals.”***

-Dan Riffle, former lobbyist for the  
Marijuana Policy Project

Report of the Special Senate  
Committee on Marijuana



March 8, 2016

# The Legalization of Marijuana in Colorado *The Impact*

Volume 4  
September 2016



Rocky Mountain High Intensity  
Drug Trafficking Area  
[www.rmhidta.org](http://www.rmhidta.org)