



Safe, Legal Access to Marijuana Can Help Fight the Opioid Epidemic

Allowing people who suffer from chronic pain to use marijuana helps reduce opiate use.

- A recent study found a **48% reduction in patients' opioid use** after three months of medical marijuana treatment.¹
- Doctors in states where marijuana was legal prescribed an average of **1,826 fewer doses of painkillers per year** to patients enrolled in Medicare Part D — which would result in a cost savings of up to \$500 million per year if medical marijuana access was legal nationwide.²
- In states that passed medical marijuana laws, fewer drivers killed in car crashes tested positive for opioids after the laws went into effect.³

Safe and legal access to medical marijuana is also associated with reduced opioid overdose deaths.

- A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 2014 found that **opioid overdose deaths were reduced by 25% in states with effective medical marijuana laws**.⁴ This reduction was greatest in states that had robust networks of dispensaries.

Allowing all adults to purchase marijuana legally results in a further reduction in opioid prescriptions and overdose deaths.

- A study of Medicaid prescriptions from 2011 to 2016 found a 6% reduction in opioid prescriptions when a state permitted medical marijuana — and a further 6% reduction when adult use was allowed.⁵
- In Colorado, legalization was associated with a short-term reduction in opioid overdose deaths in 2015, and in 2016 the rate of increase in deaths (0.8 deaths per 100,000 people) was far below the national average (an increase of 3.9 deaths per 100,000).⁶

No credible studies have ever supported the theory that the physical effects of marijuana are a gateway to opiate use.

- “There is no evidence that marijuana serves as a stepping stone on the basis of its particular physiological effect.” - Institute of Medicine⁷
- “Overall, research does not support a direct causal relationship between regular marijuana use and other illicit drug use.” - Drug Enforcement Administration⁸

In fact, forcing adults to purchase marijuana in the underground market significantly increases the likelihood that they will be exposed to other illegal products.

¹ Staci A. Gruber, et al., “Splendor in the Grass? A Pilot Study Assessing the Impact of Medical Marijuana on Executive Function,” *Front. Pharmacol.*, 13 Oct. 2016, Vol. 7.

² Ashley C. Bradford, et al., “Medical Marijuana Laws Reduce Prescription Medication Use In Medicare Part D,” *Health Aff.* July 2016, Vol. 35 no. 7.

³ June H. Kim, et al., “State Medical Marijuana Laws and the Prevalence of Opioids Detected Among Fatally Injured Drivers,” *Am. J. of Pub. Health*, Nov. 2016, Vol. 106 no.11.

⁴ Marcus A. Bachhuber, et al., “Medical Cannabis Laws and Opioid Analgesic Overdose Mortality in the United States, 1999-2010,” *JAMA Intern Med.* Oct. 2014, Vol. 174 no. 10.

⁵ Hefei Wen & Jason M. Hockenberry, “Association of Medical and Adult-Use Marijuana Laws With Opioid Prescribing for Medicaid Enrollees,” *JAMA Intern Med.* Apr. 2, 2018.

⁶ Livingston, et al., “Recreational Cannabis Legalization and Opioid-Related Deaths in Colorado, 2000-2015,” *Am. J. Pub. Health* Nov. 2017, Vol. 107 no. 11. National Institute on Drug Abuse, “Colorado Opioid Summary,” at <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids/opioid-summaries-by-state/colorado-opioid-summary>.

⁷ Marijuana and Medicine: Assessing the Science, Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences (1999).

⁸ Denial of Petition to Initiate Proceedings to Reschedule Marijuana, Federal Register, Doc. # 2016-17954, 8/12/16.