

When advocating for adults' use of marijuana, you may encounter some who strongly oppose ending prohibition and others who still have concerns about legalization. When responding, it is important to always do so in a respectful manner with accurate information. Below are some appropriate responses to some of the most common concerns.

## Marijuana is safer than alcohol.

- **The health effects of alcohol consumption are a primary factor in countless deaths, while the health effects of marijuana consumption are not a primary factor in any deaths.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were more than 30,700 alcohol-induced deaths in the U.S. in 2014. This includes deaths caused directly by long-term use and accidental overdose, but does not include deaths caused by unintentional injuries, homicides, and other causes indirectly related to alcohol use. **The CDC did not report any marijuana-induced deaths.**<sup>1</sup>
- **Every objective study on marijuana has concluded that it is less harmful than alcohol to the consumer and to society.** It is illogical to punish adults for consuming a less harmful substance, and it is irrational to steer them toward drinking if they would prefer to make the safer choice to use marijuana instead.

## Marijuana is not a gateway drug, and is significantly less addictive than alcohol and tobacco.

- **The vast majority of people who have used marijuana never try any other drugs.** About half of all Americans have used marijuana at some point in their lives.<sup>2</sup> Yet, less than 15 percent of Americans have ever tried cocaine, the second most popular illegal drug after marijuana.<sup>3</sup> If using marijuana caused people to use other drugs, there would be far more users of other drugs.
- Only nine percent of marijuana users ever meet the clinical criteria for a diagnosis of marijuana "dependence" based on the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (3rd edition, revised), compared to 15 percent of alcohol users and 32 percent of tobacco users.<sup>4</sup> Some experts believe significantly fewer marijuana users are actually dependent, because the DSM is clearly biased against marijuana use, whereas it is accepting of alcohol use.<sup>5</sup>
- Most people in treatment for marijuana were ordered there by the criminal justice system.
- By forcing marijuana consumers into the underground market, we are dramatically increasing the possibility that they will be exposed to other, more dangerous drugs.

## Regulating marijuana does not increase teen use.

- **A majority of Americans support making marijuana legal, and they care just as much about protecting young people as those who wish to keep marijuana illegal.** They simply believe regulation would be more effective.
- **Marijuana prohibition has failed miserably at keeping marijuana out of the hands of teens.** For decades, more than 80 percent of high school seniors have reported that marijuana is "very easy" or "fairly easy" to obtain.<sup>6</sup>
- **Drug dealers don't card.** In a regulated market, businesses would be required to ask customers for proof of age, and they would face severe penalties for selling marijuana to minors.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kochanek KD, Murphy SL, Xu JQ, Tejada-Vera B. "Deaths: Final data for 2014," *National Vital Statistics Reports* Vol. 65 No. 4 (2016): 13. National Center for Health Statistics.

<sup>2</sup> Gallup Poll, July 19, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Office of Applied Studies, *2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables*. Accessed online August 28, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Medicine, *Marijuana and Medicine: Assessing the Science Base* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Aggarwal, Sunil, "'9 Percent of Those Who Use Cannabis Become Dependent' Is Based on Drug War Diagnostics and Bad Science," *The Huffington Post*, January 29, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> University of Michigan/National Institute on Drug Abuse, *Monitoring the Future National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2015*.

- **Research has shown that reforming marijuana laws does not increase teen marijuana use.** A study published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* in 2016 found that the number of teens using marijuana — and the number with problematic use — is falling as more states legalize or decriminalize cannabis. The findings were based on a survey of more than 200,000 youth in all 50 states. A 2012 study conducted by researchers at universities in Colorado, Montana, and Oregon found “no statistical evidence that legalization increases the probability of [teen] use.”<sup>7</sup> Surveys of students in several states with medical marijuana laws have consistently reported declines in teen marijuana use since those laws were passed.<sup>8</sup>
- **Available data suggests that legalizing and regulating marijuana for adult use has not led to increases in teen use.** In February 2017, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment reported the rate of marijuana use among adolescents “has not changed since legalization either in terms of the number of people using or the frequency of use among users. ...Based on the most comprehensive data available, past-month marijuana use among Colorado adolescents is nearly identical to the national average.”<sup>9</sup>
  - It based this conclusion on the results of its biannual Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS), which found 21.2 percent of high school students in Colorado reported using marijuana within the past 30 days in 2015, compared to 21.7 percent nationwide. This was a slight drop from 22 percent in 2011, the year before the state approved a legalization initiative. The HKCS found that the rate of lifetime use among Colorado high school students dropped from 42.6 percent in 2009 to 38 percent in 2015.
  - Among Colorado middle school students, the rate of current marijuana use dropped from 5.1 percent in 2013 — the first year data was available — to 4.4 percent in 2015.
- Washington has had a similar experience since voters legalized marijuana in 2012. The Washington State Healthy Youth Survey, a state-run survey of 37,000 middle and high school students, found that the rate of marijuana use remained basically unchanged from 2012-2016. Surveys of students in Alaska and Oregon, both of which approved legal marijuana for adults in 2014, indicate small decreases in teen marijuana use from 2013 to 2015.

### **Regulating marijuana will not create new DUI issues.**

- **It is currently illegal to drive while impaired by marijuana, and it will remain illegal after marijuana is regulated and legal for adults.**
- There is no breathalyzer for marijuana, but there is also no breathalyzer for opiates, sleeping pills, or drowsiness. Field sobriety tests can be used to determine if a driver has a diminished capacity. Many police are trained as drug recognition experts, and can already identify marijuana DUI, which is currently illegal. Taxes from marijuana sales could be used to pay for more drug recognition training.
- Although Colorado has experienced an increase in driving fatalities in recent years, officials have cited texting and distracted driving — not marijuana — as the primary cause.
- Drunk driving is much more likely to result in an accident than marijuana consumption. A blood alcohol content of 0.08 increases crash risk eleven times over. While multiple studies have found that driving after using marijuana roughly doubles crash risk.
- **Statistics connecting marijuana use to traffic accidents are generally unreliable.** For example, marijuana can remain detectable in a user’s system for several days or even several weeks after he or she consumes marijuana, and the data on traffic accidents usually does not differentiate between whether a driver was actually under the influence at the time of the accident. Oftentimes, the data also does not differentiate between which driver was at fault, meaning drivers who tested positive for marijuana may not have actually caused the accident. In addition, some increases in marijuana detection in accidents can be attributed to increased rates of testing after marijuana became legal.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, D. Mark, Hansen, Benjamin, and Rees, Daniel I., “Medical Marijuana Laws and Teen Marijuana Use,” Institute for the Study of Labor, May 2012.

<sup>8</sup> O’Keefe, Karen, et al., “Marijuana Use by Young People: The Impact of State Medical Marijuana Laws,” Marijuana Policy Project, June 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. “Monitoring Health Concerns Related to Marijuana in Colorado: 2016. Changes in Marijuana Use Patterns, Systematic Literature Review, and Possible Marijuana-Related Health Effects.” (2017).