



Safe, Legal Access to Marijuana Provides Alternatives to Opiates

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

- A 2016 study found a **48% reduction in patients' opioid use** after three months of medical marijuana treatment.¹
- A survey of intractable pain patients in Minnesota's medical cannabis program who had used opiates before enrolling found **63% "were able to reduce or eliminate their opioid use"** after six months.²
- 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.³
- In states that passed medical marijuana laws, fewer drivers killed in car crashes tested positive for opioids after the laws went into effect.⁴

Allowing all adults to purchase marijuana legally is associated with a further reduction in opioid prescriptions and lower rates of increased overdose deaths.

- A survey of adult-use customers at Colorado cannabis retailers found 65% took cannabis to relieve pain. Of those who had taken opioid analgesics, 88% reported reducing or stopping using them.⁵
- 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.⁶
- In the first state with legal, adult-use marijuana sales, Colorado, the increase in opioid overdose deaths has been far lower than the nationwide increase. The nationwide overdose rate more than doubled from 2012 to 2017, while the increase in Colorado was much lower — 30%.⁷
- The absolute number of opioid overdose deaths is also significantly lower in Colorado than nationwide — at 10 deaths per 100,000 versus 14.9 nationwide.

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 Medicine⁸
- "Overall, research does not support a direct causal relationship between regular marijuana use and other illicit drug use." - Drug Enforcement Administration⁹

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 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 <https://www.health.state.mn.us/news/pressrel/2018/cannabis030118.html>

³ Ashley Bradford, et al., "Medical Marijuana Laws Reduce Prescription Medication Use In Medicare Part D," *Health Aff.*, July 2016, Vol. 35 no. 7.

⁴ June 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.

⁵ Marcus Bachhuber, "Use of Cannabis to Relieve Pain and Promote Sleep by Customers at an Adult Use Dispensary," *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, July 2019.

⁶ Hefei Wen and Jason Hockenberry, "Association of Medical and Adult-Use Marijuana Laws With Opioid Prescribing for Medicaid Enrollees," *JAMA Intern Med.*, Apr. 2, 2018.

⁷ Kaiser Family Foundation Opioid Overdose Death Rates and All Drug Overdose Death Rates per 100,000 Population (Age-Adjusted), <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/opioid-overdose-death-rates/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

⁸ Marijuana and Medicine: Assessing the Science, Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences (1999).

⁹ Denial of Petition to Initiate Proceedings to Reschedule Marijuana, Federal Register, Doc. # 2016-17954, 8/12/16.