

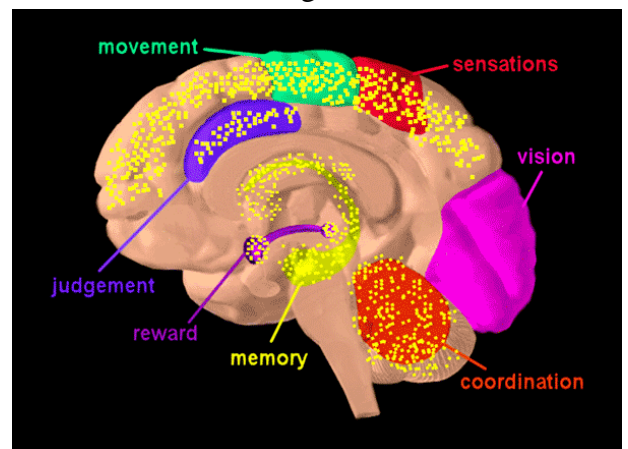
## THE VICTIMS OF MARIJUANA USE

During the 2020 presidential campaign, Vice President Kamala Harris stated that marijuana brings people joy, and there needs to be more joy in the world.<sup>1</sup> Unless joy is connected to violence, depression, and suicide, Harris is mistaken. Recent studies have revealed that marijuana is not the safe and harmless drug it is portrayed as, and the high percentage of potency in marijuana has greatly contributed to that.

### BACKGROUND

- **The history of the scheduling and legalization of marijuana.**
  - The Controlled Substances Act of 1970 categorized marijuana as a schedule 1 drug, which labels it as the highest potential for drug abuse.<sup>2</sup> The drug has remained on schedule 1 since 1970, but the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has reevaluated whether marijuana should be rescheduled or not.
  - Marijuana is the most commonly used federally illegal drug in the nation.<sup>3</sup>
  - Twenty-four states and Washington D.C. have legalized recreational marijuana, beginning with Washington and Colorado in 2012. More than half of the nation's population live in places where cannabis is legal.<sup>4</sup>
- **There is nothing “recreational” about the use of marijuana. Instead, it is a hazardous drug with short and long-term impacts.**
  - A recent Wall Street Journal article revealed that cannabis-induced disorder diagnoses had increased by more than 50% from 2019 to November of 2023.<sup>5</sup>
  - Dr. Kevin Sabet, former drug policy advisor to Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama, has connected marijuana to the mental health problems in America which has led to the increased risks of psychosis, schizophrenia, and suicide.<sup>6</sup>
  - The use of cannabis can also lead to other problems such as panic, paranoia, fear, and anxiety.<sup>7</sup>
    - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) links marijuana to suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, and suicide.<sup>8</sup>
  - One reason the dangers associated with marijuana have increased relates to the high concentration of THC.
    - In 1994, the potency of tetrahydrocannabinol, commonly referred to as THC, was around 4%.<sup>10</sup>
    - Today, THC concentrates—which include waxes, edibles, and topical applications—have been known to obtain up to 95% THC.<sup>11</sup>
    - This high concentration drives addiction and intense withdrawal symptoms, which include, but are not limited to, anger, depression, insomnia, and intense cravings of marijuana.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 1<sup>9</sup>

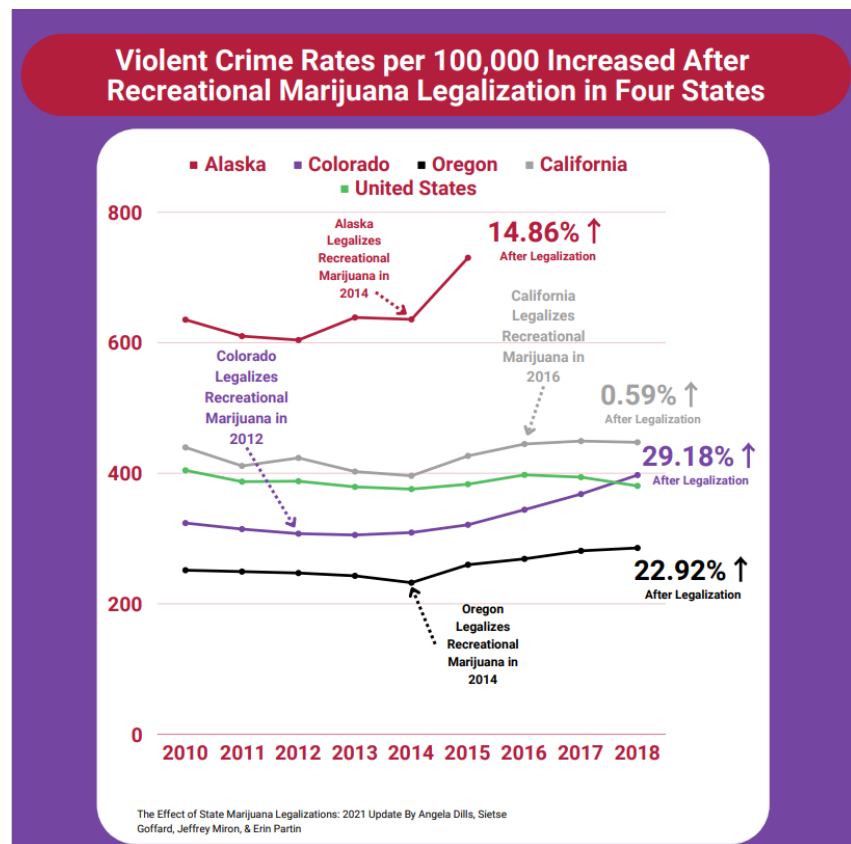


- According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 1 of 10 marijuana users become addicted. Out of those, 1 of 6 are under the age of 18.<sup>14</sup>
- A 2015 London study that found the risk of psychosis triples when an individual uses high potency marijuana. The risk for everyday users was even higher.<sup>15</sup>
- According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, if a teenager starts to use marijuana, it can completely affect the brain's ability to think, memorize, and learn.<sup>16</sup> See Figure 1, where the yellow matter illustrates the areas of the brain affected by THC.
- Dr. Stanton Glantz, former director of the University of California at San Francisco Center for Tobacco and Research and Education, stated that the brain develops until about age 25, so using psychoactive substances directly interferes with brain development.<sup>17</sup>

● **Marijuana is not a victimless crime.**

- Violent crime has surged since the recreational marijuana legalization in four states: Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, and California.<sup>19</sup> As Figure 2 illustrates, each state that has legalized marijuana has experienced an increase in violence.
- A fifty-year long study determined that marijuana usage is linked to 7-fold greater odds of subsequent violent crime.<sup>20</sup>
- A 2023 study found that cannabis is the “most common illicit substance detected in suicide victims’ toxicology tests.” The report also found that “[A] younger age of initiation, long-term use, and heavy consumption were reported to be associated with even worse suicidal outcomes.”<sup>21</sup>
- According to a study published in 2018, marijuana is remarkably associated with physical, psychological, and sexual intimate partner violence.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 2<sup>18</sup>



● **Marijuana impacts the workforce.**

- The National Institute on Drug Abuse reported, “employees who tested positive for marijuana on a pre-employment urine drug test had 55% more industrial accidents, 85% more injuries, and 75% greater absenteeism compared with those who tested negative for marijuana use”.<sup>23</sup>
- These problems also lead to other issues, such as decreased productivity, high unemployment claims, and lawsuits.<sup>24</sup>

● **The DEA has signaled a change in marijuana policy.**

- In May of 2024, the DEA announced its plans to reschedule marijuana to schedule III under the Controlled Substances Act (CSA).
  - The US Attorney General, who makes the final determination, officially submitted a notice to consider rescheduling marijuana to schedule III.<sup>25</sup> Currently, this change is in a public review and comment period. After the 60-90 day review period, the DEA will review the public comments and will make a rescheduling decision.<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, this change would move to Congress for consideration.<sup>27</sup>
- Although this change would not altogether legalize marijuana, it would normalize the high potency marijuana<sup>28</sup> and would lower restrictions for the drug.<sup>29</sup>
- Other impacts of rescheduling marijuana include:

- Allowing doctors to prescribe marijuana to treat medical conditions. Currently, marijuana is not FDA approved and cannot legally be used for medical treatment, but some drugs that emanate from marijuana can be, such as Epidiolex. They have also approved three synthetic cannabis-related drugs called Marinol, Syndros, and Cesamet.<sup>30,31</sup>
  - Cannabis businesses would be able to deduct business expenses on federal taxes.<sup>32</sup>
  - The DEA would not be required to set annual production quotas, which they are under schedule I.<sup>33</sup>
- Marijuana is already readily available across the U.S. Moving it to schedule III will only exacerbate the current problems stemming from marijuana use.

## POLICY SOLUTIONS

Instead of turning a blind eye to the dangers associated with marijuana and allowing states to have dispensaries on every corner, Congress should work to ensure that laws in relation to marijuana are enforced.

- Congress should not pass laws like the SAFE Banking Act, which would allow banks to knowingly accept drug money.<sup>34</sup>
- Congress should vote no on the CURE Act, which would provide marijuana users possible access to federal security clearances.<sup>35</sup>
- Congress should oppose any bill that will reschedule marijuana.

Marijuana is a dangerous, addictive drug with no mechanism to control rogue producers from increasing potency and causing more harm. Rather than labeling marijuana as a recreational drug, it should be labeled for what it is—a gateway drug that increases schizophrenia and impairs cognitive ability.

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