

## Marijuana: Separating Facts From Fiction

The following research is intended to be a brief snapshot of the current marijuana debate. As many as a dozen states may consider marijuana legalization through the legislature or ballot box in 2016 so it's important to know the facts surrounding this deceptively dangerous drug.

### History — A Growing Effort

- As of 2015, every state with legalized recreational marijuana started with legalizing pot for medical purposes.
- Colorado and Washington state both legalized recreational marijuana in 2012.
- Alaska and Oregon approved recreational marijuana in 2014; the District of Columbia legalized recreational marijuana in early 2015.
- As many as fourteen states are now poised to consider legalization in 2016, including: South Dakota, Florida, Massachusetts, Nevada, California, New York, New Mexico, Minnesota, Connecticut, Maryland, Vermont, Rhode Island, Maine and Michigan.

**Colorado became one of the first states to legalize recreational marijuana in 2012.** Voters were told that legalization would make available a harmless, revenue-producing substance that would not make its way into the hands of children. **However, the facts reveal the opposite, with significant negative psychological, legal, and social effects throughout the state and beyond.**

### Those Who Support Legalization Claimed:

- Marijuana is a safe, non-addicting drug.
- The state would receive large revenues from taxation.
- Legalization will reduce the black market.
- Marijuana smokers are calm, docile and unlikely to cause an increase in crime.
- Strict regulations will keep marijuana out of the hands of children and underage teenagers.

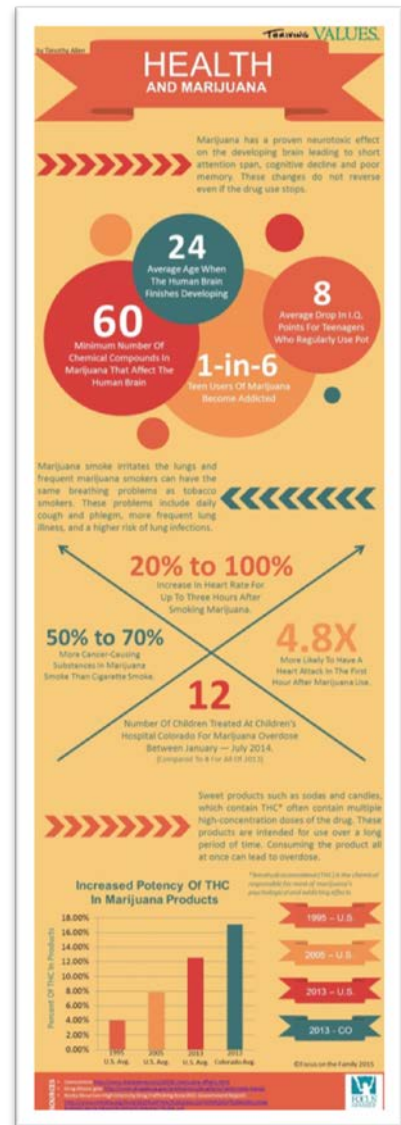


Image 1: Health Effects of Marijuana  
(Click Image to View Larger)

## Opponents Of Legalization Countered:

- This is not the same pot popularized in the 1970's — today's marijuana is much more potent, addicting and dangerous.
- Increased costs of enforcement and other social problems will swallow up any tax profits.
- High state taxes, plus profit margins at dispensaries means that black-market sources of the drug will still be the less-expensive option.
- Individuals who are high on marijuana are dangerous behind the wheel of a car.
- The risk of youth using the drug will increase if it becomes legalized, leading to problems in schools and families.

## The Numbers Are In

The most reliable data on the impact of recreational marijuana comes from Colorado. Since legalization, the available statistical data paints a less-than-positive picture.

### A Tax On The Economy:

- Colorado officials estimated the state would take in approximately \$100 million in various marijuana tax revenues in its first year (2014).<sup>i</sup>
- This included licensing fees for marijuana businesses and a whopping 25 percent worth of sales taxes.
- However, the actual intake was only \$66 million,<sup>ii</sup> falling short of budget projections and, as a result, law enforcement, hospitals, schools, drug treatment and education programs took a significant financial cut.
  - The \$40 million that was projected to go to schools (based on a 15-percent excise tax) only generated \$13.6 million in 2014.<sup>iii</sup>
- Additionally, the cost of growing marijuana in warehouses has caused a significant spike in Denver's energy usage,<sup>iv</sup> with some growers reporting monthly electric bills near \$40,000.<sup>v</sup> This is four times the energy used by hospitals on a per-square-foot basis.<sup>vi</sup>

### Crime On The Increase:

- More than 38 states have reported seizures of Colorado marijuana and marijuana-laced products illegally shipped out of state.<sup>vii</sup>
  - The U.S. Postal Service interceptions, involving Colorado marijuana bound for other states, have **risen over 2,000 percent.**<sup>viii</sup>

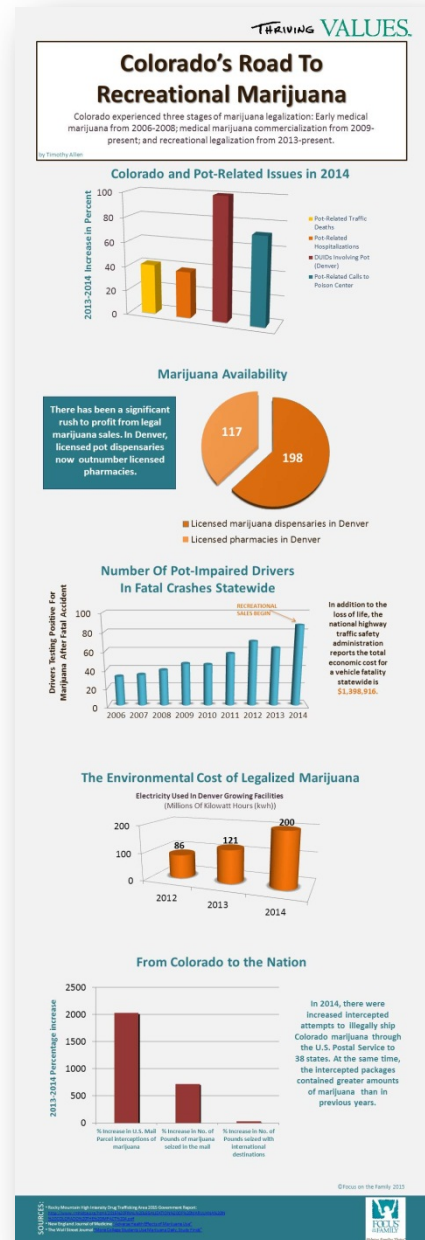


Image 2: Colorado's Road to Recreational Marijuana (Click Image To View Larger)

- The black market continues to thrive: The high taxes which are imposed on legal marijuana sales make the store-bought product more expensive than what can be purchased on the streets.<sup>ix,x</sup> Some former pot-shop owners are now operating illegally out of their vehicles for greater profit margins than before.<sup>xi</sup>
- Colorado police and sheriff's offices have reported a significant increase in the number of drivers testing positive for pot use, as well as an increase in the number of those drivers involved in fatal traffic accidents.<sup>xii</sup>

## Increased Drug Use:

- Americans' consumption of illicit drugs is on the rise,<sup>xiii</sup> and Colorado's use rates are higher than the national average.<sup>xiv</sup>
- School suspensions related to marijuana possession have risen sharply.<sup>xv</sup>
- A coalition of sheriffs from Colorado, Nebraska and Kansas are suing the state of Colorado for problems related to the increased cost of enforcement of Colorado's law.<sup>xvi</sup>
  - The suit also alleges hospital rooms and jails in the neighboring states are "filling up," forcing them to deal with the medical and legal costs associated with increased drug usage.
- Pueblo, Colo. reports a sharp increase in the number of homeless individuals who claim to have traveled to the city in order to access the marijuana available there.<sup>xvii</sup>

*Questions? [ThrivingValues@Family.org](mailto:ThrivingValues@Family.org)*

If you or a loved one struggles with drug addiction, you can contact us at Focus on the Family's counseling line. To reach Focus on the Family's counseling service by phone, please call 1-800-A-Family (232-6459) on weekdays, from 6:00 a.m. — 8:00 p.m. (Mountain Time). Please be prepared to leave your contact information for a counselor or chaplain to return a call to you, as soon as possible. The consultation is available at no cost to you. You may also reach our counselors online by filling out our Counseling Request Form.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/02/12/colorado-s-pot-revenue-goes-up-in-smoke.html>

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.denverpost.com/election/ci\\_28803471/ahead-2015-vote-campaign-pushes-marijuana-tax-question](http://www.denverpost.com/election/ci_28803471/ahead-2015-vote-campaign-pushes-marijuana-tax-question)

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/revenue/colorado-marijuana-tax-data>

<sup>iv</sup> [http://www.denverpost.com/environment/ci\\_28417456/pot-boom-spikes-denver-electric-demand-challenges-clean](http://www.denverpost.com/environment/ci_28417456/pot-boom-spikes-denver-electric-demand-challenges-clean)

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.bizjournals.com/denver/print-edition/2015/08/07/colorado-pot-growers-face-sky-high-power-bills.html>

<sup>vi</sup> <http://evan-mills.com/energy-associates/Indoor.html>

<sup>vii</sup> <http://www.rmhidta.org/html/2015%20FINAL%20LEGALIZATION%20OF%20MARIJUANA%20IN%20COLORADO%20THE%20IMPACT%204.pdf> (page 4)

<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.rmhidta.org/html/2015%20FINAL%20LEGALIZATION%20OF%20MARIJUANA%20IN%20COLORADO%20THE%20IMPACT%204.pdf> (page 4)

<sup>ix</sup> <http://money.cnn.com/2014/09/02/news/economy/marijuana-taxes-colorado/>

<sup>x</sup> <http://denver.cbslocal.com/2015/05/06/pot-delivery-services-thriving-in-colorados-black-market/>

<sup>xi</sup> <http://www.ibtimes.com/pulse/colorado-marijuana-legalization-2015-fighting-black-market-everyday-challenges-1913431>

<sup>xii</sup> <http://www.rmhidta.org/html/2015%20FINAL%20LEGALIZATION%20OF%20MARIJUANA%20IN%20COLORADO%20THE%20IMPACT%204.pdf> (pages 21-27)

<sup>xiii</sup> <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/nationwide-trends>

<sup>xiv</sup> <http://www.cpr.org/news/story/chart-colorado-among-states-growing-heroin-prescription-drug-abuse-problem>

<sup>xv</sup> <http://www.rmhidta.org/html/2015%20FINAL%20LEGALIZATION%20OF%20MARIJUANA%20IN%20COLORADO%20THE%20IMPACT%204.pdf> (pages 41, 42)

<sup>xvi</sup> <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/03/05/sheriffs-from-three-states-sue-colorado-over-marijuana/24385401/>

<sup>xvii</sup> <http://www.chieftain.com/special/marijuana/2168858-120/marijuana-chieftain-homeless-mertz>