The HIGH Cost of Marijuana

Can Indiana Afford the Social Costs of More Access to Pot?

Marijuana is becoming big business in many parts of America. Special interests are pushing states to expand public access to this drug through a variety of claims. One temptation to lawmakers is the claim that marijuana has economic benefits to states that ease restrictions on pot use.



Today, Colorado has more marijuana dispensaries than it does *Starbucks* or *McDonald's*. This doesn't mean that the increased sale and use of the drug has been a golden goose for the state. Marijuana sales are subject to the regular state sales tax of 2.9 percent. In addition, recreational sales are subject to a special 15 percent excise tax and a 10 percent sales tax. Still, pot revenues represent less *than 1 percent* of the state's income. How much is marijuana **costing Colorado and similar states in social** problems? It is a question Hoosier policy makers should ask before moving forward and inhaling the claims of pot advocates.

The HIGH Cost to Employers

More American workers are testing positive for illegal drugs than at any time in the last 12 years according to a study from *Quest Diagnostics Inc.*, one of the nation's leading workplace-testing labs. However, in Colorado and Washington, the first states to legalize recreational marijuana, the positivity rate for marijuana is much higher.

A recent article in a pro-marijuana publication revealed a lot about the cost pot is having on many employers. It reports:

"Workers at McLane drive forklifts and load hefty boxes into trucks. The grocery supplier, which runs a warehouse in Colorado, needs people who will stay alert – but prospective hires keep failing drug screens."

"Some weeks this year, 90 percent of applicants would test positive for something . . . Finding people to fill jobs is really challenging," said Laura Stephens, a human resources manager for the company in Denver. "We saw a big spike in failed tests after pot became legal." - *www.thecannabist.co/2017/05/17/drug-testing-marijuana-job-applicants/79691/*

Curtis Graves, the information resource manager at the Mountain States Employers Council said "employers are extremely worried about filling jobs. Work that is considered 'safety sensitive' typically requires that [drug] test, and that's not changing."

CEO Jim Johnson of GE Johnson, a major construction company in Colorado Springs, said his company has encountered so many job candidates who have failed pre-employment drug tests because of their marijuana use that his company has to actively recruit construction workers from other states. It became such a problem that his company decided to abandon local job-recruitment efforts and look outside Colorado for drug-free employees.

"Our workplaces are too dangerous and too dynamic to tolerate drug use. And marijuana? In many ways, this is worse than alcohol. I'm still in shock at how we voted. Everyone was asleep at the wheel, Johnson said."- *Colorado Springs Gazette 3/24/15*

A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that workers who tested positive for marijuana on a pre-employment urine drug tests had 55% more industrial accidents, 85% more injuries, and 75% greater absenteeism compared with those who tested negative for marijuana use. -

JAMA. 1990;264(20):2639-2643.

The HIGH Cost of Education

Marijuana is now the #1 reason for student expulsions from K-12 schools in Colorado.

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Considerable evidence suggests that students who smoke marijuana have poorer educational outcomes than their nonsmoking peers. For example, a review of 48 relevant studies found marijuana use to be associated with reduced educational attainment. - *The*

Lancet, London England 2004;363(9421)

A recent analysis using data from three large studies in Australia and New Zealand found that adolescents who used marijuana regularly were significantly less likely than their non-using peers to finish high school or obtain a degree. They also had a much higher chance of developing dependence, using other drugs, and attempting suicide.

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University found that compared to students who did not use marijuana at all, those who used marijuana less than weekly were 2.6 times more likely to be school dropouts. Those who used marijuana weekly were 5.8 times more likely to dropout.

This is a long-lasting economic problem Indiana should consider. Columbia researchers also found that by their 40s, those who had used marijuana in adolescence or young adulthood still had less educational attainment than their non-user peers years later.

The HIGH Cost of Youth Suicide

Marijuana is now the # 1 illicit substance found in Colorado suicides among children ages 10-19 years old. THC was present in 18% of all youth suicide toxicology reports from 2014 through 2016 in Colorado.

The study published in the *Lancet Psychiatry Journal*, September, 2014, tracking teenage marijuana use in Australia and New Zealand, showed that consistent early use below age 18 is connected to a *7-times higher risk of attempted suicide* before age 30.

The HIGH Cost of Highway Driving

In 2014, their first year after legalization, marijuana-impaired drivers increased 50% in Washington. This state leads the nation in stoned drivers with 27% of their fatal accidents being caused by drivers using marijuana - *http://*

wtsc.wa.gov/research-data/quarterly-target-zero-data/

In 2009 marijuana-related traffic deaths represented 10% of all traffic fatalities in Colorado before legalization. By 2015 that number had doubled to 21%. - *HIDTA www.rmhidta.org*

The HIGH Cost of Health Care

Marijuana today is much more potent than it was in the 1960's or 70's. In the years after Colorado legalized marijuana, emergency room visits have increased 49% due to marijuana related hospitalizations.

- 2011 - 6,305
- 2012 - 6,715
- 2013 - 8,272
- 2014 - 11,439

Calls to poison control for children consuming marijuana-infused candy and THC products have increased by similar rates in Colorado after legalization. - *CNN 8/14/2017*

Marijuana may be taxable. However, taxes are only one side of the equation. The human costs of more marijuana may be too much to ask Hoosiers to pay.