

Pot Use Ramping Up

As legalization gains steam, usage heads up

By [Kevin Sabet](#) @KevinSabet

Americans 12 and older used significantly more marijuana in 2014 than in 2013, and pot use among younger youths is also on the rise, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, a publication funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Overall, in the 12 and older category, 8.4 percent said they had used pot in the previous month during 2014, compared to just 7.5 percent in 2013, and only 6.2 percent in 2002.

Looking more specifically at younger demographics, more 12-to-17 year-olds used pot in 2014 than in 2006, and more 18-to-25 year-olds used in 2014 than in 2009. Those use rates are still lower than those in 2002, but overall they are still way higher than in the 1980s and 1990s, before “medical” marijuana and legalization gained prominence.

The survey also found that the number of people, especially young people, perceiving great harm in smoking marijuana at least once a week also fell significantly. Currently, only 37 percent of 12-to-17 year-olds find smoking marijuana at least once a week to be harmful, compared to 55 percent in 2005 and 45 percent in 2011.

Experts, like National Institute on Drug Abuse Director Nora Volkow, have long stated that lowered perceptions of harm precede increases in use.

The survey was national in scope — it didn’t focus just on states that have legalized marijuana. When one does look at data in Colorado, things look even worse. A White House-funded report released Tuesday painted the following, distressing picture:

- Marijuana-related traffic deaths: up 32 percent from 2013 to 2014, just as marijuana began to be sold legally.
- Driving under the influence: Drivers testing positive for marijuana have increased 45 percent during the same period.
- Marijuana-related emergency room visits: up 29 percent.
- Marijuana-related hospitalizations: up 38 percent.
- Use by young people on probation: up 20 percent.

And youth marijuana use? Colorado ranks 56 percent higher than the national average.

This is hardly a model of success.

Of course, it will take years to fully gauge the effect of legalized marijuana in Colorado and Washington (that state has been more mum about data collection — though a report out last month by the state toxicologist found that driving while intoxicated on marijuana cases jumped about 20 percent since legalization). But these early indications are not helpful. Just last week, more than 11,000 pot plants were found in central Colorado’s San

Isabel National Forest, belying the claim that legal marijuana would eliminate the black market and illegal cultivation.

So much for “regulate and control.”

It’s time we stop the influence of the special interest marijuana lobby and stop legalization in its tracks. Its record — so far — is certainly nothing to brag about.

The author served in the Obama administration as senior advisor at the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy from 2009 to 2011.

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