

Legalisation: real statistics not ideology

Colorado serves as an experimental lab for not only the US but also other countries to evaluate the impact of legalising marijuana. It is an important opportunity to gather and examine meaningful data and identify trends – any decisions on this life-changing issue should be delayed until there is sufficient and accurate data to make informed decisions.

What is the debate?

Those in favour of legalisation argue that the benefits of removing 'prohibition' outweigh the potential negative consequences. Some of the cited benefits include:

- Eliminate arrests for possession and sale, resulting in fewer people with criminal records and a reduction in the prison population
- Free up law enforcement resources to target more serious and violent criminals
- Reduce traffic fatalities since users will switch from alcohol to marijuana, which does not impair driving to the same degree
- No increase in use, even among youth, because of strict regulations
- Added revenue generated through taxation
- Eliminate the black market.

Those opposed to legalising marijuana argue that the potential benefits of lifting prohibition pale in comparison to the adverse consequences. Some of the cited consequences include:

- Increase in marijuana use among youth and young adults
- Increase in marijuana-impaired driving fatalities
- Rise in number of marijuana-addicted users in treatment
- Diversion of marijuana

- Adverse impact and cost of the physical and mental health damage caused by marijuana use
- The economic cost to society will far outweigh any potential revenue generated.

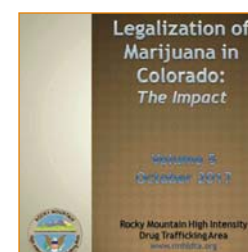
What are the facts relating to these claims?

[The Legalisation of Marijuana in Colorado: The Impact](#) was compiled by one of the White House's High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas, Rocky Mountain. The report compares, where possible, three different eras in Colorado's legalisation history:

- 2006-2008: pre-commercialisation era of 'medical' marijuana
 - 2009-present: commercialisation and expansion era of medical marijuana
 - 2013-present: 'recreational' marijuana era.
- The statistics in this article are from the Rocky Mountain HIDTA's 168-page 5th annual report on the impact of legalised marijuana in Colorado. The report is divided into 10 sections, as follows.

1 – Impaired driving and fatalities.

- ① Marijuana-related traffic deaths when a driver was positive for marijuana more than doubled from 55 deaths in 2013 to 123 deaths in 2016.
- ① Marijuana-related traffic deaths rose 66% in the four-year average (2013-2016) since Colorado legalised recreational marijuana compared to the four-year average (2009-2012) before that.
- ① During the same time period, all traffic deaths increased 16%.
- ① In 2009, Colorado marijuana-related traffic deaths involving drivers testing positive for marijuana represented 9% of all traffic deaths. By 2016, the number of such deaths had more than doubled to 20%.



About the author

The High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program (HIDTA) is a component of the President's National Drug Control Strategy which provides additional federal resources to help eliminate or reduce drug trafficking and its harmful consequences. Law enforcement organisations within HIDTAs assess drug trafficking problems and design specific initiatives to reduce or eliminate the production, manufacture, transportation, distribution and chronic use of illegal drugs and money laundering, "reduce drug trafficking & related crime and violence". HIDTA has been operating since 1996.

Colorado has been scrupulous in gathering and disseminating statistics on the impact of marijuana legalisation in the state. Here, we give the stark facts, not speculations.

2 – Youth Marijuana Use.

- ① Youth past month marijuana use increased 12% in the three-year average (2013-2015) since Colorado legalised recreational marijuana compared to the three-year average before that.
- ① The latest 2014/2015 results show Colorado youth ranked #1 in the nation for past-month marijuana use, up from #4 in 2011/2012 and #14 in 2005/2006.
- ① Colorado youth past-month marijuana use for 2014/2015 was 55% higher than the national average compared to 39% higher in 2011/2012.

3 – Adult Marijuana Use.

- ① College age past month marijuana use increased 16% in the three-year average (2013-2015) since Colorado legalised recreational marijuana compared to the three-year average prior to legalisation (2010-2012).
- ① The latest 2014/2015 results show Colorado college-age adults ranked #2 in the US for past-month marijuana use, up from #3 in 2011/2012 and #8 in 2005/2006.
- ① Colorado college age past-month marijuana use 2014/2015 was 61% higher than the national average compared to 42% higher in 2011/2012.
- ① Adult past-month marijuana use increased 71% in the three-year average (2013-2015) since Colorado legalised recreational marijuana compared to the three-year average before that.
- ① The latest 2014/2015 results show Colorado adults ranked #1 in the US for past-month marijuana use, up from #7 in 2011/2012 and #8 in 2005/2006.
- ① Colorado adult past-month marijuana use for 2014/2015 was 124% higher than the national average compared to 51 % higher in 2011/2012.



4 – Emergency department and hospital marijuana-related admissions.

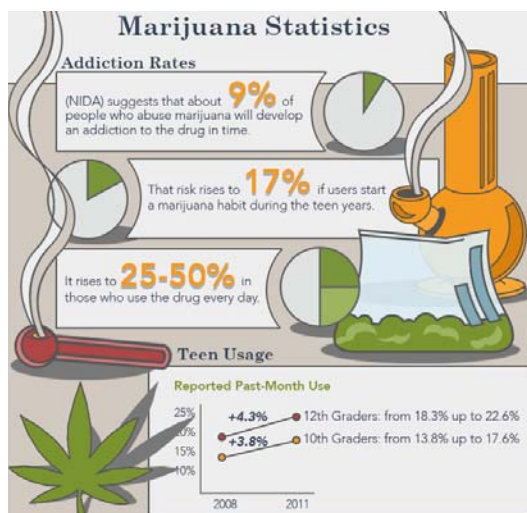
- ① The yearly rate of emergency department visits related to marijuana increased 35% after the legalisation of recreational marijuana (2011-2012 vs 2013-2015).
- ① Hospitalisations related to marijuana:
 - > 2011 – 6,305
 - > 2012 – 6,715
 - > 2013 – 8,272
 - > 2014 – 11,439
 - > Jan-Sept 2015 – 10,901.
- ① Yearly marijuana-related hospitalisations increased 72% after the legalisation of recreational marijuana (2009-2012 vs. 2013-2015).

5 – Marijuana-related exposure.

- ① Marijuana-related exposures increased 139% in the four-year average (2013-2016) since Colorado legalised recreational marijuana compared to the four-year average (2009-2012) before that.
- ① Marijuana-only exposures more than doubled (increased 210%) in the four-year average (2013-2016) since Colorado legalised recreational marijuana compared to the 2009-2012 average.

What has been the impact of commercialised 'medical' marijuana and legalised recreational marijuana on Colorado? Review the statistics and you decide.

Infographic by American
Addiction Centers from data by
[www.drugabuse.gov/
publications/research-reports/
marijuana/marijuana-addictive](http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/marijuana-addictive)
[https://www.whitehouse.gov/
ondcp/frequently-asked-
questions-and-facts-
about-marijuana](https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/frequently-asked-questions-and-facts-about-marijuana)



6 – Treatment.

① Marijuana treatment data from Colorado in 2006-2016 shows an average 6,683 treatment admissions annually for marijuana abuse.

① Over the last 10 years, the top four drugs involved in treatment admissions were alcohol (average 13,551), marijuana (average 6,712), methamphetamine (average 5,578), and heroin (average 3,024).

7 – Diversion of Colorado marijuana.

① In 2016, RMHIDTA Colorado drug task forces completed 163 investigations of individuals or organisations involved in illegally selling Colorado marijuana both in and out of state. These cases led to:

- > 252 felony arrests
- > 7,116 (3.5 tons) pounds of marijuana seized
- > 47,108 marijuana plants seized
- > 2,111 marijuana edibles seized
- > 232 pounds of concentrate seized
- > 29 different states to which marijuana was destined.

① Highway interdiction seizures of Colorado marijuana increased 43% in the four-year average

(2013-2016) since Colorado legalised recreational marijuana compared to the 2009-2012 average.

① Of the 346 highway interdiction seizures in 2016, there were 36 different states destined to receive marijuana from Colorado. The most common destinations identified were Illinois, Missouri, Texas, Kansas and Florida.

8 – Diversion by parcel.

① Seizures of Colorado marijuana in the US mail increased 844% from an average of 52 parcels (2009-2012) to 491 parcels (2013-2016) in the four-year average that recreational marijuana has been legal.

① Seizures of Colorado marijuana in the US mail increased 914% from an average of 97 pounds (2009-2012) to 984 pounds (2013-2016) in the four-year average prior to that.

9 – Related data.

① Crime in Denver increased 17% and crime in Colorado increased 11% from 2013 to 2016.

① Colorado annual tax revenue from the sale of recreational and medical marijuana was 0.8% of Colorado's total statewide budget (FY 2016).

① As of June 2017, there were 491 retail marijuana stores in the state of Colorado compared to 392 Starbucks and 208 McDonald's.

① 66 % of local jurisdictions have banned medical and recreational marijuana businesses.

10 – Reference materials.

For the research references and descriptions of all the statistics in this article, you can browse www.rmhidta.org/html/FINAL%202017%20Legalization%20of%20Marijuana%20in%20Colorado%20The%20Impact%20Rich%20Text.pdf