

QUICK FACTS

Who is in jail and prison for marijuana?

- A rigorous government analysis of who is in jail or prison for marijuana found that less than 0.7% of all state inmates were behind bars for marijuana possession only (with many of them pleading down from more serious crimes).ⁱ
- Federal data show that the vast majority (99.8 percent) of Federal prisoners sentenced for drug offenses were incarcerated for drug trafficking.ⁱⁱ

What about treating marijuana like alcohol?

- Under legalization, more people, not fewer, will be ensnared in the criminal justice system. A fact most people do not know is that alcohol — not cocaine, heroin or marijuana — is responsible for 2.6 million arrests every year. That is 1 million more arrests than for all illegal drugs combined. The reason? Alcohol is used so much more commonly than illegal drugs. People are being arrested for violating liquor laws, driving while intoxicated and public drunkenness (the 2.6 million number doesn't even include violent crimes that result from alcohol use. That isn't to say that current drug policies aren't also costly to the criminal justice system. They are. But that is precisely why we need smarter enforcement policies — not legalization, which would very likely compound the current costs.

The Myth of the Infamous Tax Revenue

- Any tax revenue gained from legal marijuana would be quickly offset by the social costs. Let's take a look at two legal substances:
 - Federal excise taxes collected on alcohol in 2007 totaled around \$9 billion; states collected around \$5.5 billion. Combined, these amounts are less than 10 percent of the estimated \$185 billion in alcohol—related costs to health care, criminal justice, and the workplace in lost productivity.
 - Tobacco does not yield net revenue when taxed. Each year, Americans spend more than \$200 billion on the social costs of smoking, but only about \$25 billion is collected in taxes..^{iv}

Drug Cartels and The Black Market

- The truth is, marijuana legalization would do nothing to diminish the power of the cartels, primarily because marijuana accounts for a tiny share of revenues gained by drug trafficking groups. For them, the big money is found in sexier illegal trade, such human trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, piracy and other illicit drugs.^v
- Marijuana accounts for only a portion of the proceeds (about 15--20%) gained by criminal organizations that profit from drug distribution, human trafficking and other crimes. So, legalizing marijuana would not deter these groups from continuing to operate.

- Under the most commonly proposed legalization regime – one that imposes high taxes on marijuana – violent drug cartels would simply undercut legal prices to keep their market share. With increased demand for marijuana resulting from legalization, these groups would likely grow stronger.

Marijuana and Health

Addiction

- 1 in 10 people who try marijuana becomes addicted to it, developing a dependence that produces withdrawal and cravings. If marijuana use starts in adolescence, the chances of addiction are 1 in 6.^{vi}
- Long-term studies from the United States and New Zealand have shown that regular cannabis smokers report more symptoms of chronic bronchitis than non-smokers.^{vii}
- And today's marijuana is not the marijuana of the 1960s: potency has grown five-fold or more in the past 30 years.

The Brain and Mental Health

- Marijuana use directly affects the brain, specifically the parts of the brain responsible for memory, learning, attention and reaction time. These effects can last up to 28 days after abstinence from use of the drug.^{viii}
- Science confirms that the adolescent brain, particularly the part of the brain that regulates complex cognitive behavior, personality expression, decision making and social behavior, is not fully developed until about the age of 25. Developing brains are especially susceptible to all of the negative effects of marijuana and other drug use.^{ix}
- Marijuana use has been shown to be significantly linked with mental illness, especially schizophrenia and psychosis, and also depression and anxiety.^x

ⁱ "Substance Abuse and Treatment, State and Federal Prisoners, 1997." BJS Special Report, January 1999, NCJ 172871.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/satsfp97.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/fjs09st.pdf>

^{iv} See <http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/taxfacts/displayafact.cfm?Docid=399>. Also Harwood, H. (2000), *Updating Estimates of the Economic Costs of Alcohol Abuse in the United States: Estimates, Update Methods and Data*. Report prepared for the National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse.

^v State estimates found at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/31/weekinreview/31saul.html?em>; Federal estimates found at

https://www.policyarchive.org/bitstream/handle/10207/3314/RS20343_20020110.pdf; Also see

<http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0072.pdf>; Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, see "Smoking-caused costs," on p.2.

^{vii} Kilmer, Beau, Jonathan P. Caulkins, Brittany M. Bond and Peter H. Reuter. Reducing Drug Trafficking Revenues and Violence in Mexico: Would Legalizing Marijuana in California Help?. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010. http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP325.

^{viii} Wagner, F.A. & Anthony, J.C. From first drug use to drug dependence; developmental periods of risk for dependence upon cannabis, cocaine, and alcohol. *Neuropsychopharmacology* 26, 479-488 (2002).

^{ix} <http://www.rwjf.org/content/rwjf/en/research-publications/find-rwjf-research/2007/02/effects-of-marijuana-smoking-on-pulmonary-function-and-respirato.html>

^x Hall W & Degenhard L (2009). Adverse health effects of non-medical cannabis use. *Lancet*, 374:1383-1391

^{xi} Giedd. J. N. (2004). Structural magnetic resonance imaging of the adolescent brain. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1021, 77-85.

^{xii} Moore TH, Zammit S, Lingford-Hughes A, et al. Cannabis use and risk of psychotic or affective mental health outcomes: A systematic review. *Lancet* 370(9584):319-328, 2007. Also Large, M., Sharma S, Compton M., Slade, T. & O., N. (2011). Cannabis use and earlier onset of psychosis: a systematic meta-analysis. *Archives of General Psychiatry*. 68. Also see Arseneault L, et al. (2002). Cannabis use in adolescence and risk for adult psychosis: longitudinal prospective study. *British Medical Journal*. 325, 1212-1213.