

Does the Availability of Medical Marijuana Decrease Opiate Use? Surveying the Landscape

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Chronic Pain Treatment

- Opioids were involved in more than 42,000 deaths in America in 2016, two-thirds of all of drug overdose deaths, according to the CDC.
- More research is needed to understand the full impact of the legalization of marijuana on the public health, but research indicates that opiate use is decreasing in states which have legalized marijuana.^{1,2} Twenty nine states have passed laws that recognize the medical value of cannabis.
- It has been established that cannabis has less morbidity and mortality risk than opiates. While neither Medicaid nor Medicare will reimburse patients for marijuana, it is easier to obtain for chronic pain treatment than opioids in many cases, and most Americans (6 in 10) support its legalization, according to Pew Research.

Barriers

- Lack of clinical trials of the therapeutic efficacy of cannabis.
- Cannabis is still a DEA Schedule 1 Drug.
- No currently accepted medical use according to the DEA.
- Lack of insurance coverage.

“If you’re interested in giving people options for pain management that don’t bring the particular risks that opiates do, states should contemplate turning on dispensary-based cannabis policies.”³



“Medical marijuana laws reduce the daily doses filled for opioid analgesics among Medicare Part-D and Medicaid enrollees, as well as population-wide opioid overdose deaths.”⁴

“Medical marijuana legalization was associated with 23% (p=0.008) and 13% (p=0.025) reductions in hospitalizations related to opioid dependence or abuse and Opioid Pain Reliever overdose.”⁵

Medical Uses

Medical marijuana may be used to:



- Ease pain (including chronic and nerve pain)
- Control nausea (such as that caused by chemotherapy)
- Stimulate appetite (to avoid weight loss due to illness)

Information for Librarians/Resources

- American Society of Addiction Medicine: Marijuana Advocacy Toolkit
- Drug Policy Alliance Fact Sheet: Marijuana and Opiates
- National Institute on Drug Abuse: Marijuana as Medicine
- University of Washington Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute: Learn About Marijuana

References

1. Hill KP, Saxon AJ. **The Role of Cannabis Legalization in the Opioid Crisis.** JAMA Intern Med. 2018 Apr 2. PMID: 29610836.
2. Bradford AC, Bradford WD, Abraham A, Bagwell Adams G. **Association Between US State Medical Cannabis Laws and Opioid Prescribing in the Medicare Part D Population.** JAMA Intern Med. 2018. Epub 2018/04/02 PMID: 29610897.
3. Stat News, April 2, 2018. **Where marijuana is legal, opioid prescriptions fall, studies find.** <https://www.statnews.com/2018/04/02/marijuana-legal-opioid-prescriptions/>
4. Powell D, Pacula RL, Jacobson M. **Do medical marijuana laws reduce addictions and deaths related to pain killers?** J Health Econ. 2018;58:29-42. PMID: 29408153.
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