

There are two sides to every story. However, facts are important to consider when making important decisions. LEARN wants to follow up on some common arguments related to medical marijuana, with the facts.

### 1. Sick children cannot afford to wait for the FDA process.

To guarantee that people with chronic health issues receive medicine that we *know* will help them, it is important to follow the FDA process. This will ensure that the medicine is safe *and* effective; Physicians and pharmacists will know how it will react with other medications, and what side effects may occur. The FDA ensures that vaccinations, over the counter medications, antibiotics, and cancer treatments are all regulated and legalized by a trusted process. Abandoning that process would produce more—not fewer—negative outcomes for the patients it was formulated to treat.

2. 44 people die everyday from prescription drug abuse.<sup>1</sup> Those prescriptions are legal. Marijuana has never killed 44 people in one day.

Legalizing medical marijuana will not solve the Rx drug abuse problem in our country. If people are abusing prescriptions, it is unlikely that they will switch over to abusing marijuana *instead*. Also, it seems inconsistent for Nebraska to pass LB 471 to improve Nebraska's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program in order to prevent Rx drug abuse, and then take steps backwards to legalize marijuana as medicine that has not been FDA approved for medical purposes *and* has addictive properties (like opioids). The prevalence of marijuana use more than doubled between 2001 and 2013, and there was a large increase in marijuana use disorders (i.e. addiction) during that time.<sup>8</sup> 3 out of 10 Americans who use marijuana have some sort of use disorder.<sup>8</sup>

3. Many states are increasing the state funding for their schools by legalizing marijuana in either medical or recreation form and taxing it. We could increase school funding in Nebraska this way.

The tax benefits for all other states that have legalized for medical or recreational use have not outweighed the start up costs or the social costs. Initially, we would have to use taxpayer dollars to start the program. For example, Minnesota spent over \$2 million in taxpayer revenue to get their program up and running.<sup>2</sup> Also, employers would lose money in productivity and healthcare costs, taxpayers would lose money to social costs, and the sales tax revenue from marijuana would not even begin to cover all those costs.<sup>3</sup>

4. My great-uncle was in a lot of pain from cancer. Smoking marijuana helped him stay comfortable and he found that it was the only thing that really helped his pain, without giving him the side effects that other pain medications gave him.

The THC in marijuana can be helpful in *numbing* (not treating) someone's pain while they are using. However, once the THC wears off, the pain will return. This is a problem that people also experience with opioids. The relief they get from one symptom can come at a cost of damage to the brain/body or development of another health problem. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine dosages for each health condition due to the lack of rigorous clinical studies to determine dose per health condition. (For example: smoking 2 joints per day for a certain condition versus 4 joints for another condition? What is the level of THC?, etc.) If research discovers that there are measurable, low-risk amounts of THC that can be consumed and are helpful for certain medical conditions, then LEARN will fully support this research.

In addition to the arguments people make regarding medical marijuana, it is important to consider the facts about what the impact would be from legalizing marijuana for **recreational** use.

1. Alcohol and tobacco kill more people than marijuana and we let *those* two things be legal.

Nearly 600,000 people *do* die every year from alcohol and tobacco related ailments.<sup>3,4</sup> However, this number has nothing to do with marijuana. No research indicates that people will stop using tobacco and alcohol if marijuana were legal. Many people would then use all three of these substances,<sup>6</sup> which would increase the cost to our society even further. Alcohol alone cost our society \$237.8 billion in social costs, while it only brings in \$15.3 billion in tax revenue.<sup>3</sup> The only way that this argument can be free of a fallacy would be if *marijuana* were to be legalized and tobacco or alcohol were made illegal in its place.

2. It is no worse than alcohol.

Research has shown that there are low risk amounts of alcohol that can be consumed by adults that are low-risk for health problems and low-risk for impairment problems.<sup>5</sup> There are no clinically proven low-risk amounts of THC that can be consumed and still be considered low-risk. Consuming THC is always high-risk because it is high-risk for impairment problems (DUI, committing crimes, relationship problems).

3. People are going to do it either way if they really want to. Why not make it legal so that we can at least collect some tax money off of it?

When a substance is illegal, it is not consumed by as many people or in as high of quantities as when it is legal. While *some* people will use marijuana whether it is legal or not, places that make it legal have seen an *increase* in use, in adults *and* youth. Taxing and legalizing a product does not mean the “black market” will disappear. In fact, researchers from the RAND Corporation have noted a significant profit motive for existing black market providers to stay in the market, “as they can still cover their costs of production and make a nice profit.”<sup>3</sup>

4. If marijuana was legal, we would save millions of dollars in taxes that we currently spend on **imprisoning** people for marijuana charges.

People may get arrested for being in possession of marijuana, but less than 1% of prison populations consist of offenders there for simple possession.<sup>3</sup> People in prison for drug charges are often there for crimes they committed while they were under the influence of marijuana. If marijuana were legal, more people would use. Impairment prevents people from making good choices,<sup>5</sup> and more high-risk choices (i.e. crime) would occur. This is why there has been an increase in marijuana related crimes in states that have legalized it.<sup>7</sup>

## Sources

1. CDC Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/>
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3. National Office on Drug Control Policy: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/frequently-asked-questions-and-facts-about-marijuana>
4. CDC Website: [http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/fact\\_sheets/health\\_effects/tobacco\\_related\\_mortality/](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/health_effects/tobacco_related_mortality/)
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