

HIGH POTENCY THC MARIJUANA NEGATIVELY IMPACTS OUR MOST VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

The intent of this paper is to make people aware of the potential impact high potency marijuana has on justice involved individuals with mental health disorders and to provide recommendations for people to consider when addressing these issues. The intent is to improve the treatment of mental health and further reduce involvement in the justice system.

- Many people believe that marijuana is a safe and effective medicine for many medical conditions, however:
- Research supporting marijuana use for medical conditions is limited to marijuana with less than 10% THC
- Most products available in Colorado medical marijuana dispensaries contain more than 15% THC, with potencies ranging up to 90% THC
- There is no legitimate research supporting the use of wax, shatter, dab, hash oil, or any product with THC greater than 10% for any medical condition

The belief that these products are safe and medically legitimate has negatively affected the most vulnerable in our society including children, adolescents, young adults, and those with mental health and addiction problems, resulting in:

- **More addiction.** The more potent a drug, the more addicting it is, resulting in significant increases in cannabis use disorder requiring treatment
- **Greater adolescent high potency THC use.** There have been significant increases in the use of high potency THC concentrates (dabbing, edibles, vaping) by adolescents in Colorado
- **Negative mental health outcomes.** High THC is linked to increases in psychosis, depression, anxiety, suicide, and violence in both adolescents and adults
- **Greater medical costs.** We are seeing increased visits to EDs by adolescents with behavioral health problems and adolescents and adults with cannabis hyperemesis syndrome in Colorado
- **Diminished potential for many teenagers.** Use of marijuana during adolescence, especially high potency marijuana, can cause long-term or possibly permanent adverse changes in the brain

The Colorado Task Force Concerning the Treatment of Individuals with Mental Health Disorders in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice System (MHDCJS) and the Colorado Substance Abuse Trend and Response Task Force (SATRTF) are collaborating on the following recommendations to help address the public's confusion regarding medical marijuana. This is for the purpose of addressing health and behavioral health related issues, not for involving individuals in the criminal justice system.

- 1) Improve data on the impacts of high potency THC cannabis in vulnerable populations by encouraging clinical providers in health care, behavioral health, and criminal justice agencies to collect data regarding cannabis use, including questions about THC and CBD, potency, type of products, delivery system (smoke/vape/edibles/oil/ concentrates), type of purchase (i.e. recreational, medical, or home grow). When drug tests are administered with this population, ensure the testing includes THC levels.
- 2) Develop provider education on known impacts of cannabis use on physical and mental health and require that medical marijuana prescribers and vendors receive such education and certification indicating they have completed the education to ensure consumers receive accurate information and informed consent regarding the use of medical marijuana.
- 3) Restore funding to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Retail Marijuana Education Program to develop Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and education materials for the public regarding cannabis use risks.
- 4) Enforce the rules that strictly limit or eliminate advertising of cannabis products similar to alcohol, tobacco and electronic vape products, including marketing by social media influencers, that appear to be directed to adolescents/young adults.
- 5) Limit potency of THC to under 10% in **medical** cannabis and eliminate the concentrates such as wax, shatter, dab from **medical** cannabis since there is no research on these products for any **medical** condition.
- 6) Put Medical Marijuana recommendations on the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) in Colorado. If Colorado is legitimately supporting the use of medical marijuana in people with mental illness, and in particular those involved in the criminal and juvenile justice system, then there needs to be monitoring.