

Debate

Should marijuana be legalized in the United States?

ISSUE: Do the benefits of marijuana legalization outweigh the costs?

Cannabis Sativa, or marijuana, has been around for centuries. This small green flowering plant is grown in many locations across the world. Marijuana is made from the flowering top of the Cannabis Sativa plant. It contains the chemical Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which is what causes mind-altering states among marijuana users. THC has been known to vary in potency in different types of the Cannabis Sativa plant. Marijuana can be dated back as far as 6000 B.C. when its seeds were used in the food of China. During the times of Napoleon it was used for its pain relieving mechanisms and sedative effects.

Marijuana is also used for its psychoactive effects. For instance, it has been used to induce changes in mood and consciousness as well as to relax and calm down. Marijuana has commonly been referred to as a “recreational drug” due to the high number of users that seek the psychoactive effects of the drug.

Studies indicate that use of marijuana can have both short-term and long-term effects to overall health. The short term effects include the inability to concentrate and distortions with sense and time. The long term effects are more detrimental to health and can include respiratory issues similar to smoking tobacco (due to smoking the drug), reduction of sperm and testosterone levels in men, impacts on the ovulation and premenstrual cycles of women, as well as fatigue, decreases in libido, impaired fertility, and changes in body composition (increased fat mass and decreased muscle mass).

There have been studies indicating that the use of marijuana and the Cannabis Sativa plant may help to reduce the symptoms of certain ongoing medical conditions. Some of the major findings indicate that it helps glaucoma, cancer, and multiple sclerosis patients. Other studies have disputed these claims. Some research has shown that using marijuana reduces the nausea and vomiting of cancer patients receiving chemotherapy. However, while more than 18 states have legalized marijuana for medical purposes, until recently marijuana for recreational purposes remained illegal.

In 2012 Colorado and Washington legalized the use of recreational marijuana for adults over 21. The states will attempt to regulate the use of marijuana similar to how they regulate alcohol. Washington will place a 25 percent tax on marijuana purchases. In Colorado individuals over 21 can grow up to six plants for personal use and purchase one ounce of marijuana from specialty dispensaries. Only licensed sellers are allowed to sell marijuana.

The legalization of marijuana has generated much debate. Supporters of legalization point to the fact that prohibiting marijuana usage has been largely ineffective at curbing the use of the drug. Some of the benefits include the fact that drug trafficking and the costs of marijuana will go significantly down with legalization, which could negatively impact the profits of illegal drug dealers. They also point out that marijuana has less of a longterm negative health impact than tobacco, and a recent study indicated that marijuana has no long-term negative health effects on an individual’s cognitive ability. Legalization could provide much needed tax revenue for states.

This material was developed by Alicja Spaulding and Stephanie Fernandez under the direction of O.C. Ferrell and Linda Ferrell. Danielle Jolley and Jennifer Sawayda provided major updates. It is intended for classroom discussion rather than to illustrate effective or ineffective handling of administrative, ethical, or legal decisions by management. Users of this material are prohibited from claiming this material as their own, emailing it to others, or placing it on the Internet. (2013)

Analysts predict it could generate \$60 million by 2017. Additionally, supporters claim that costs will decrease as there will not be as much of a need to enforce prohibition.

On the other hand, critics of the measure argue that costs could actually increase with legalization. Many believe that the financial implications can involve the increase of costs for drug education, rehabilitation centers, and drug treatment programs. It is estimated that 9 percent of marijuana users become addicted and need clinical help. Opponents also claim that even if marijuana might not be as harmful as tobacco, unlike tobacco it causes intoxication. Because marijuana causes people to "get high," it has been a factor in some traffic accidents and crime rates. Finally, they point to the fact that legalizing other harmful behaviors such as gambling has done nothing to reduce the rate of gambling. Currently, the Obama administration does not support the legalization of marijuana, so while it is legal in two states, it remains illegal on a federal level. This creates a problem for colleges and universities in these states, which receive significant federal funding. The federal government may be less likely to provide funding if colleges allow for marijuana use on their campuses.

There are two sides to every issue:

1. Marijuana usage should be legalized because the benefits of legalization outweigh the costs.
 2. Marijuana should not be legalized because the harmful impact to society is greater than any benefits.
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