



# MARIJUANA PREVENTION AMONG HISPANIC AND LATINO YOUTH

July, 2022

## OVERVIEW OF ADULT MARIJUANA USE IN THE UNITED STATES

Across the United States, marijuana is one of the most used substances. About 48.2 million Americans (18% of the US population), reported marijuana use at least once in 2019.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that about thirty percent of those who use marijuana have a marijuana use disorder.

One of the largest and fastest growing subpopulations in the United States is the Hispanic and Latino community, which represents 18.7% of the U.S. population, or about 62 million people.<sup>2</sup> This number is projected to grow to 28.6%, or 119 million people, by the year 2060.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, it is estimated that Hispanic and Latino youth will make up close to one-third of the US youth population in the coming decades.<sup>4</sup> Hispanic youth have also been found to have higher rates of substance use, when compared with other racial and ethnic groups, especially when it comes to the use of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana.<sup>4</sup>

## WHY IS THIS AN ISSUE?

Contrary to popular belief, marijuana use is detrimental to the development of the human brain, is addictive, and contributes to lack of motivation. Marijuana use has also been attributed to teenagers not completing high school, which may be a risk factor for other poor health outcomes. Early initiation of marijuana use is also a strong indicator for future substance misuse, including cocaine and heroin use.<sup>4</sup> Just as is the case with other substances, individuals may experience withdrawal symptoms when reducing or eliminating marijuana use. Withdrawal symptoms of marijuana include irritability, anxiety, respiratory challenges, and cognitive issues such as confusion, memory loss, and thinking difficulties.

## HOW DOES MARIJUANA USE IMPACT HISPANIC AND LATINO COMMUNITIES?

Just as the “War on Drugs” in the US has negatively impacted the adult Hispanic and Latino communities, it has also impacted the youth in those communities. There is an overrepresentation of Hispanic and Latino youth in the juvenile justice system.<sup>5</sup>

Policies attempting to reduce the use of Marijuana negatively impact Hispanic and Latino adults and youths alike. Some of these impacts have included mass incarceration, and deportation due to drug offenses. When parents are impacted by policies, so are their children, adding to the impact of the “War on Drugs.” Also, the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health observed an increase in marijuana use among Hispanic and Latino youth ages 12-17 years.<sup>6</sup>

## THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON MARIJUANA USE IN HISPANIC AND LATINO COMMUNITIES

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on marijuana use appears to have been positive. The 2021 Monitoring the Future Survey of 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> grades, of which 16.7% of respondents were Hispanic and Latino, indicated that Marijuana decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey observed a significant decrease in past year use for students in all grades.<sup>7</sup>

Despite these optimistic trends for school aged Hispanic and Latino youth, the social isolation experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to increased depression and anxiety, as well as other indicators related to poor mental health. Surveys implemented in the beginning of the pandemic did show a shift for some youth in the types of substances used, specifically a decrease in alcohol use and increase in nicotine products and prescription medications.

## References

1. [Marijuana and Public Health](#)
2. [US Census data](#)
3. [Latinx/Hispanic Communities and Mental Health](#)
4. [Problematic Substance Use in Hispanic Adolescents and Young Adults: Implications for Prevention Efforts](#)
5. [Hispanic and Latino Youth and Marijuana](#)
6. [2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Hispanic SAMSHA](#)
7. [Percentage of adolescents reporting drug use decreased significantly in 2021 as the COVID-19 pandemic endured](#)
8. [Healthy People 2030](#)



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This shift was especially true for those youth struggling with anxiety or depression or those with a family history of substance misuse.<sup>7</sup>

## THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH ON SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER IN HISPANIC AND LATINO COMMUNITIES

According to Healthy People 2030, the Social Determinants of Health are “the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.”<sup>8</sup>

Some ways in which the Social Determinants of Health show up in the issue of substance misuse among the Hispanic and Latino community include a lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate treatment options for both mental health and substance use and discriminatory treatment of the Hispanic and Latino community.<sup>3</sup> Even when treatment is available, Hispanic and Latino individuals often wait longer to access treatment than their non-Hispanic and non-Latino counterparts.<sup>9</sup>

Some other ways in which social determinants of health may impact youth substance use include the types of prevention programming available in schools, the types of out-of-school programming available to youth, and supportive services available to both youth and their families.

## HOW DOES SUBSTANCE USE RELATE TO MENTAL HEALTH?

More than 8 million Americans report that they suffer from both mental health issues and substance use disorder, according to American Addiction Centers.<sup>10</sup> While community stigma may inhibit discussion around this issue, both mental illness and substance use do impact the Hispanic and Latino community. Many times individuals, including youth, will use substances to treat the symptoms of mental illness.

### References

9. [Alcohol & Drug Abuse Among the Hispanic Population](#)
10. [The Intersection of Mental Health and Substance Abuse](#)
11. [Mental Health Disorders and Teen Substance Use](#)

For example, alcohol may be used to treat stress and anxiety.<sup>10, 11</sup> While there are many substances that individuals may use to address mental illness, the most used to meet this need are marijuana, heroin, and alcohol.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Hispanic and Latino high school-aged youth have reported experimenting with these and other illicit substances at higher rates than their non-Hispanic peers.<sup>4</sup>

## HOW TO ENHANCE THE PROTECTIVE FACTORS TO CREATE HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES?

As is true with mental illness, targeted strategies and interventions have the potential to reduce possible risk factors and increase protective factors. While there are many universal risk factors associated with substance misuse, there are also risk factors specific to the Hispanic and Latino community. One risk factor associated with marijuana use among Hispanic and Latino youth is regularly experiencing racism and discrimination.<sup>5</sup> Immigration status can also be a risk factor for marijuana use among Hispanic and Latino youth.

Undocumented immigrants, for example, are less likely to seek help and are at a greater risk for marijuana use than documented immigrants and U.S. born Hispanic and Latino youth.<sup>5</sup> Acculturation gaps between Hispanic and Latino youth and their parents and other family members can lead to an evolution of cultural values leading to more individualistic thinking, which may ultimately become a risk factor for marijuana use.<sup>5</sup>

While there is often discussion surrounding the risk factors associated with youth marijuana use, there are also protective factors that help to prevent marijuana use among Hispanic and Latino youth. One way this can be done is through partnerships with religious and community organizations.<sup>3</sup>



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Many times these institutions are trusted in the community and can provide support and services that may be difficult to access. Faith is also a strong protective factor against substance use in the Hispanic and Latino community. <sup>12</sup> The strength of the family unit, including the extended family, also known as familismo, can become a preventive network of safety and support. The family unit can help create “social and environmental” systems to establish and reinforce appropriate behavior. <sup>5</sup> Other cultural values, such as “respeto”, can be used to encourage attitudes that are protective against substance use. <sup>13</sup> Evidence-based curricula that support collectivism in school and enhanced family engagement are also helpful in increasing protective factors among Hispanic and Latino youth. <sup>14</sup>

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Parents' Guide to Preventing Underage Marijuana Use](#), brochure by Seattle Children's Hospital and UW School of Social Work

[Familia Adelante](#): Multi-risk Reduction Behavioral Health Prevention for Latino Youth and Families

[NIDA for teens](#)

[Resources from SAMHSA](#)

[Facts About Drugs](#)

[The Reality of Legal Marijuana and Hispanic Latino Youth](#)

[PTTC Network](#)

**Click here to visit our website and to access more information:**

[National Hispanic and Latino Prevention Technology Transfer Center](#)

Also, you can visit the following websites for additional information.

### SAMHSA's National Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP (24/7/365)  
Treatment Referral Information Service  
in English and Español)  
Website: <http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

### SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline

Toll Free: 1-800-985-5990 (español e inglés)  
Text in Spanish: Envíe “Háblanos” al 66746  
Text in English: “TalkWithUs” al 66746  
(TTY): 1-800-846-8517  
English:  
<http://www.disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>  
v  
Spanish:  
<https://www.samhsa.gov/disaster-distress-helpline/espanol>

### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Toll Free: 1-888-628-9454  
English: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)  
(TTY): 1-800-799-4TTY (4889)  
Spanish:  
<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol/>  
English:  
<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

**SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator** Sitio  
Web: <https://findtreatment.gov>

### Marijuana Anonymous

<https://marijuana-anonymous.org/find-a-meeting/>

## References

12. [Mobilizing the Hispano/Latino Faith Community in Substance Abuse Prevention](#)
13. [Cultural Values Associated with Substance Use Among Hispanic Adolescents in Southern California](#)
14. [Collectivism in Smoking Prevention Programs for Hispanic Preadolescents: Raising the Ante on Cultural Sensitivity](#)