



# Navigating the Green Wave: Strategies for a Local Response to Cannabis Legalization

Mariah Flynn

September 24, 2024



South Southwest (HHS Region 6)

**PTTC** Prevention Technology Transfer Center Network  
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At the time of this publication, Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D, served as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The opinions expressed herein are the view of PTTC Network and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this document is intended or should be inferred.

This work is supported by grants 6UR1TI08205-02M002, SM081726 and 1H79SP081006-01 from the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.



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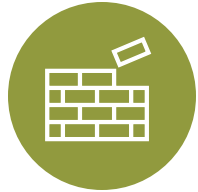
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# Learning Objectives



Describe the impact of cannabis legalization on youth



Define actionable steps to effectively address the impact of cannabis legalization



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Mariah Flynn (she/her)  
*Burlington Partnership for a  
Healthy Community*



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# Roadmap for Today

- ✓ What we know about cannabis and marijuana
- ✓ Changing laws
- ✓ Talking with youth about cannabis
- ✓ Policies and strategies that support health and youth prevention
- ✓ Resources
- ✓ Evaluation



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# Language Matters

## Marijuana and Cannabis: What's the Difference?



**Cannabis** - refers to all parts of or products derived from the Cannabis plant.

**Marijuana** - refers to parts of or products from the plant (usually the leaves and flowers) that contain substantial amounts of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the psychoactive component of the plant that can make people intoxicated.

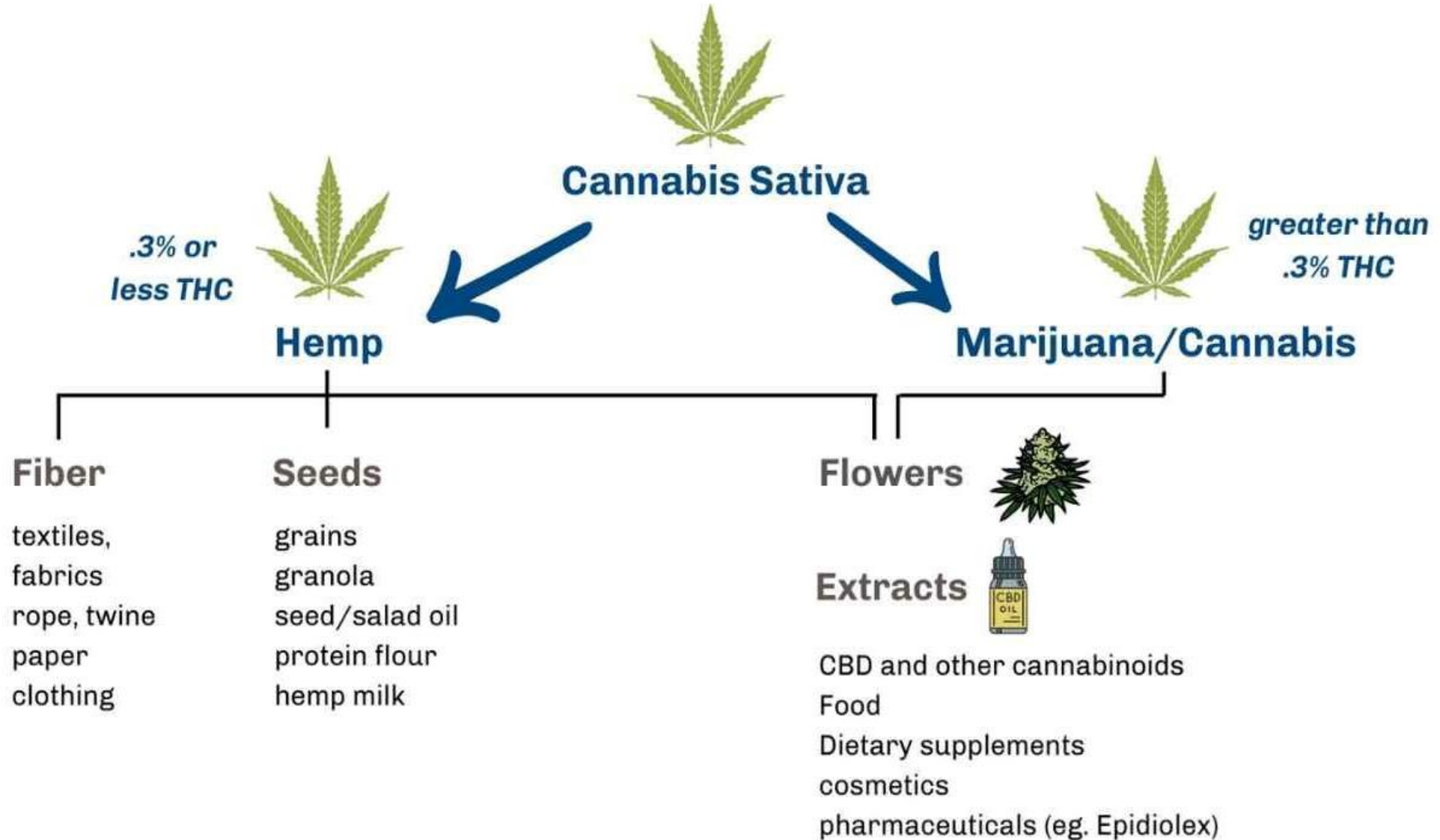


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# CBD and Hemp



# Medical Cannabis



The FDA has not approved the cannabis plant for any medical use.

The FDA has approved 3 prescriptions that contain cannabis derived compounds.



**Epidiolex** - purified CBD from cannabis, approved for two rare and severe forms of epilepsy

**Marinol & Syndros** - synthetic THC, approved for treating nausea and vomiting from chemotherapy for cancer or appetite and weight loss from HIV/AIDS.



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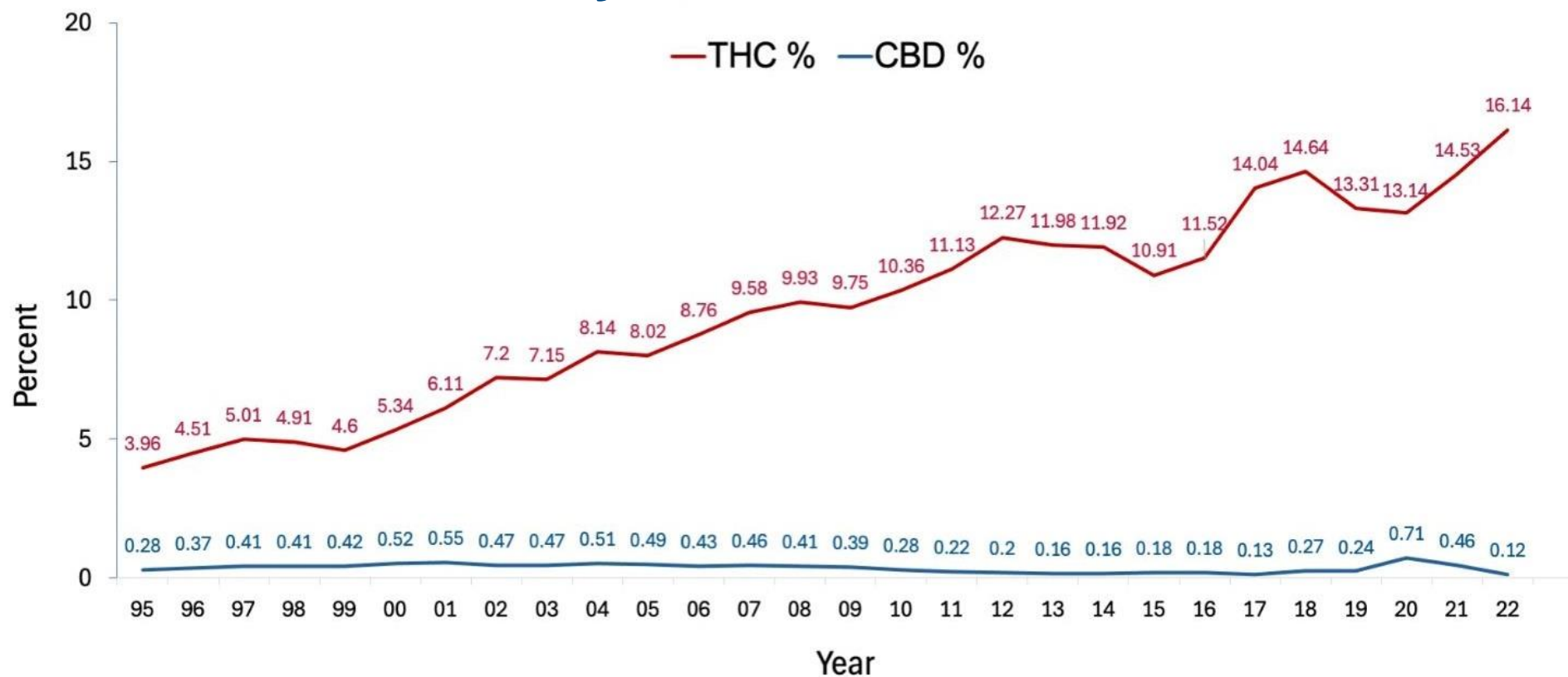
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What does cannabis with THC look like now?

# Percentage of THC & CBD in Cannabis Samples Seized by the DEA, 1995-2022



**Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and Cannabidiol (CBD) Potency of Cannabis Samples Seized by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Percent Averages from 1995-2022.**

**Source: NIDA, Potency Monitoring Program**

# Understanding Increasing Potency



The screenshot shows the top portion of the Denver Post website. The masthead includes the newspaper's name, navigation links for News, Sports, Business, Things To Do, Outdoors, Opinion, and Classifieds, and buttons for 'Subscribe' and 'Log in'. A weather widget shows 53°F. A featured article is titled 'Colorado reckons with high-potency marijuana and its impact on children' with a sub-headline 'State lawmakers mulling an overhaul of weed regulations, but THC caps likely dead for now'.

**THE DENVER POST**

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53°F

**POLITICS • News**

## Colorado reckons with high-potency marijuana and its impact on children

State lawmakers mulling an overhaul of weed regulations, but THC caps likely dead for now



**In states that legalized use of cannabis with THC the significant majority of products have >15% THC.**

**Potency rates of up to 95.7% were recorded.\***



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**Buds**



**Wax**



**Resin**



**Shatter**



**Kief**



**Vape pen with  
cannabis oil**



**Tincture**



**...and more**



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# Commercial THC Products for Sale

## WASHINGTON

*From left to right:* oil capsules, peach ring gummies, chocolate chip cookie dough, orange cream soda, sugar packets, chocolate covered malted milk ball, jalapeno ranch pretzels, and rainbow belt gummies.



## COLORADO

*Clockwise from left:*  
THC inhaler,  
THC-infused sexual lubricant,  
THC-infused mouth spray, THC-infused suppository.



# Commercial THC Products for Sale

**VT:** Lavendar bath salts, food & beverage infuser, watermelon gummies, maple seltzer



**IL:**  
French  
Onion  
Soup Mix



**CA:** THC infused tablets



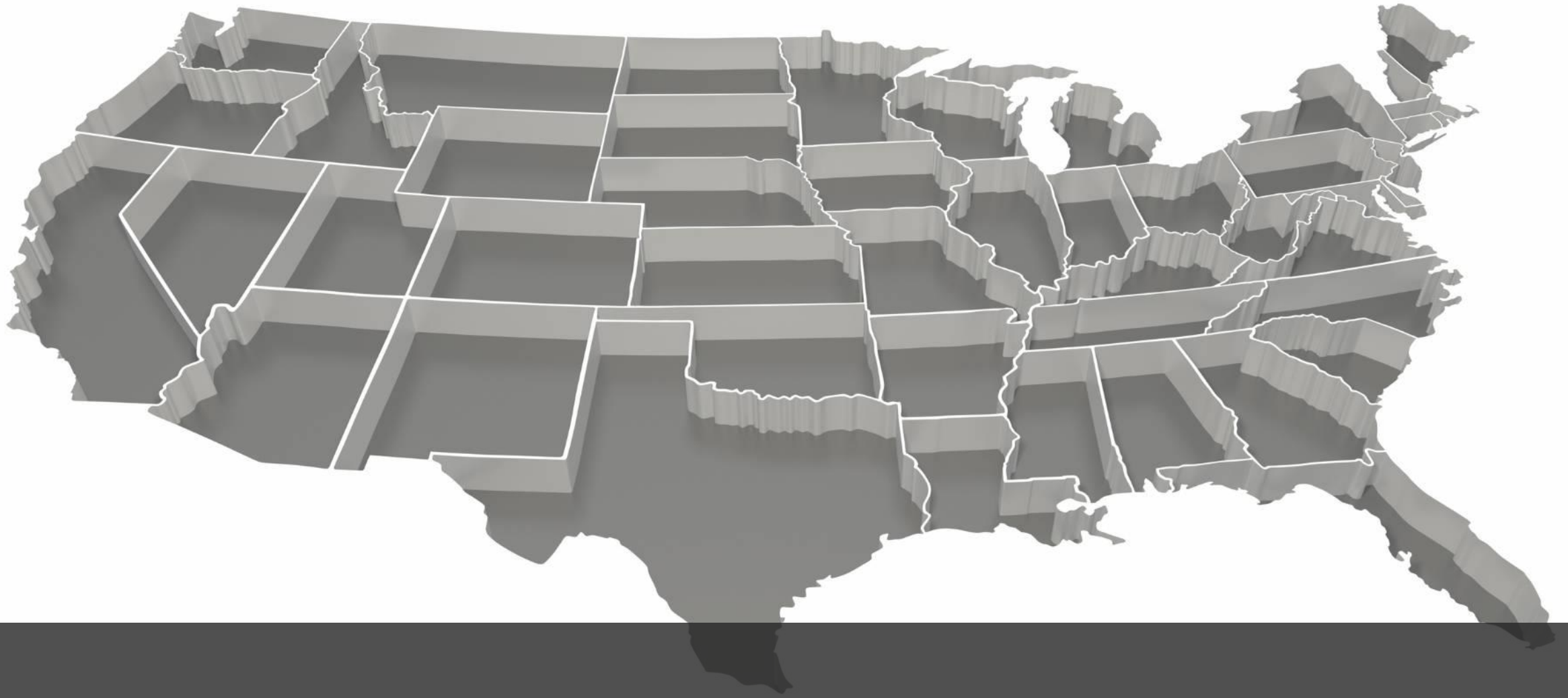
**NV:** Tropical  
Breath Mist



**NEW MEXICO**

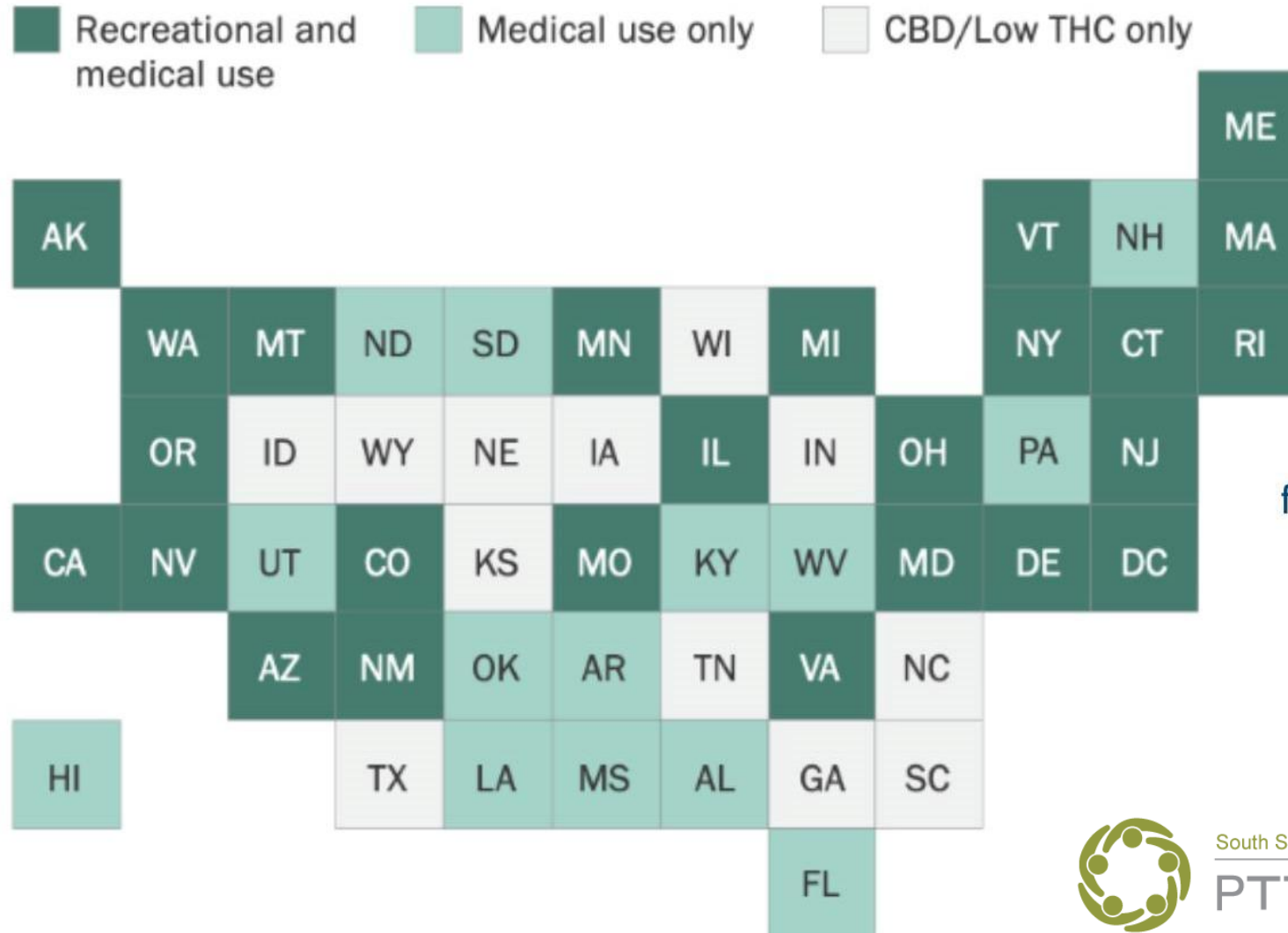
*Left to right:* Raspberry gummies, tea-lemonade drink, chewy candies, rosin (76.84% THC), lotion (80.26% THC)





What's legal?

# Half of US States Have Legalized Commercial Cannabis Sales and Use






from Pew Research Center

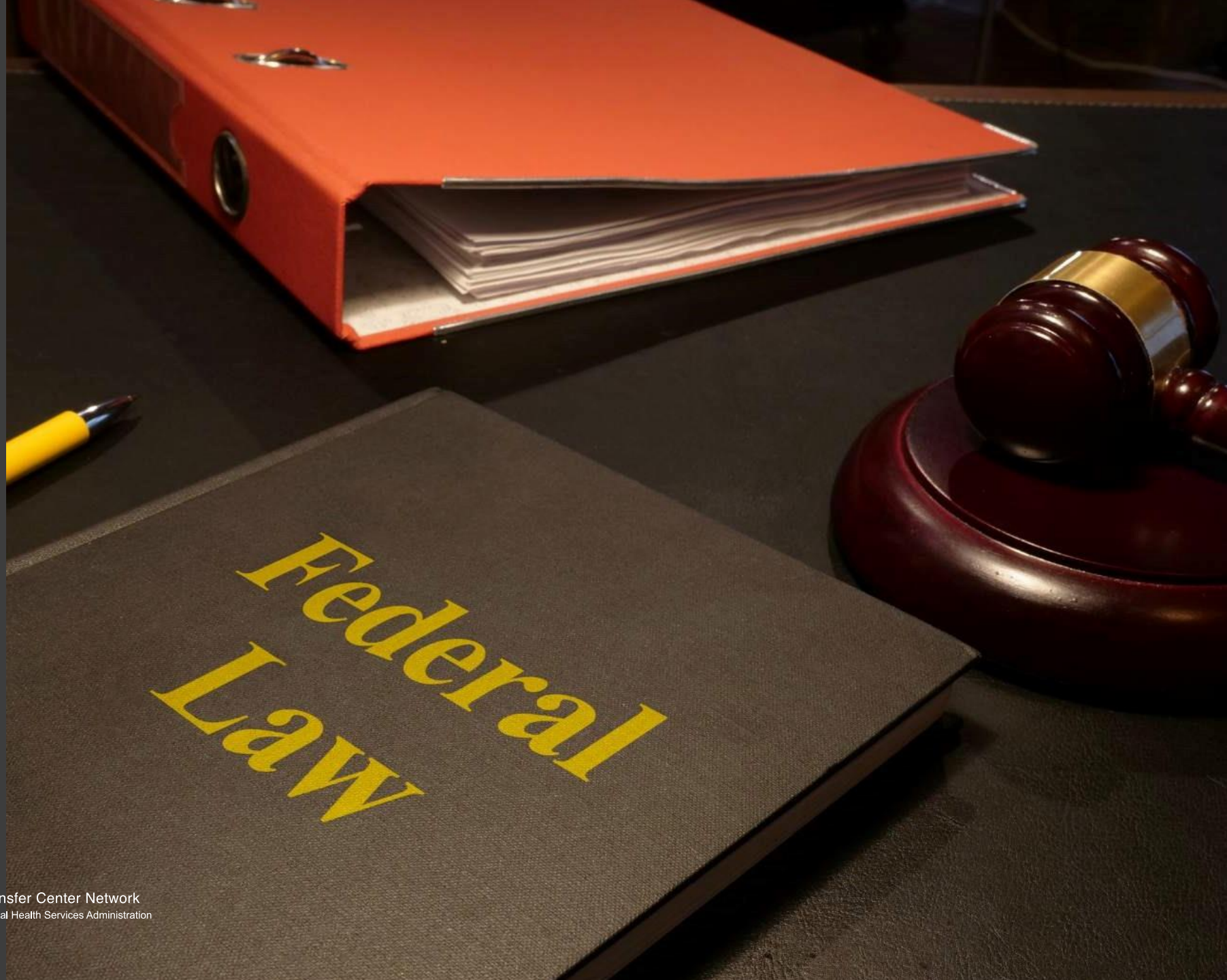




# Lots of Variation in State Laws

STATE	LEGAL SALES STARTED	POTENCY LIMITS	SPECIFICS
 Colorado	Jan 2014	None, No more than 10 mg in a serving.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cannot purchase more than 1 ounce at a time</li></ul>
 California	Jan. 2018	None, No more than 10 mg of THC in a serving.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cannot use in public spaces, in national parks, or within 1000 feet of a school, day care center, or youth center</li><li>• limits on advertising (must be where 71.6% of audience is 21+, not within 1000 ft of school or childcare center)</li></ul>
 New Mexico	April 2022	30% THC limit for cannabis flower, 70% limit for concentrates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• no public consumption</li><li>• limits on how much an individual can purchase or possess</li><li>• limits on advertising</li><li>• subject to municipal zoning</li></ul>

Federally,  
possession,  
use, and  
sales of  
cannabis are  
still illegal.



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# 2.2 million illegal cannabis packages mimicking junk food seized in California

A sting operation by California authorities resulted in the seizure of more than 2.2 million illegal cannabis packages designed to mimic junk food, including Sweetarts and Twinkies.



**Jonathan Limehouse**  
USA TODAY

Published 2:55 p.m. ET Aug. 15, 2024 | Updated 11:33 a.m. ET Aug. 16, 2024



A sting operation in California led to the seizure of more than 2.2 million illegal cannabis packages designed to mimic popular food and candy items, including Sweetarts and Twinkies.

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## Billion dollar marijuana operation, illegally run by Chinese nationals in the U.S.

Published: Jan. 12, 2024 at 4:10 PM EST



ADVERTI

Aug 7, 2024

## California seizes over \$120 million in illegal cannabis since January

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:** In 2024, the Governor's Unified Cannabis Enforcement Task Force seized over \$120 million in illegal cannabis and eradicated nearly 123,000 illegal plants. Through these law enforcement operations, officials have destroyed more than 37 tons of unlicensed cannabis — as heavy as over 20 cars.

Recent news

Governor Newsom  
statement on Californian  
Hersh Goldberg-Polin

Sep 1, 2024



By —  
Tim  
McPhillips

## Weed is legal in New York, but the illegal market is still booming. Here's why

Leave your  
feedback

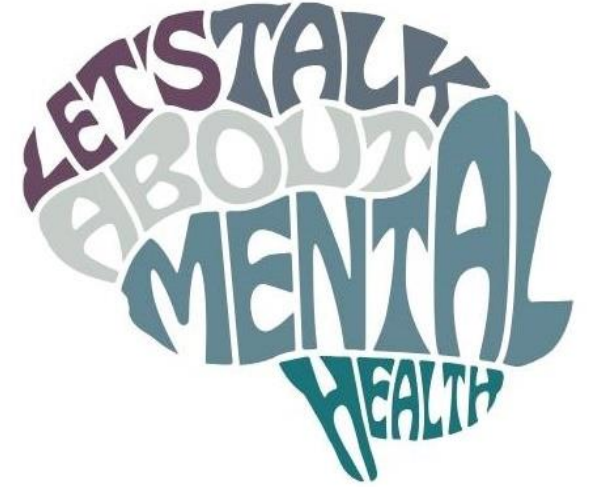
Nation Mar 28, 2023 6:00 AM EDT



Health and Data

# Health Impacts

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There is substantial evidence of a statistical association between cannabis use and...

- worse respiratory symptoms
- frequent chronic bronchitis episodes
- increased risk of motor vehicle crashes
- lower birthweight of offspring (maternal use)
- development of schizophrenia or other psychoses (highest risk from frequent use)
- increases in cannabis use frequency and the progression to developing problem cannabis use
- use at early age increases risk of developing problem cannabis use.

# Health Impacts

There is moderate evidence of a statistical association between cannabis use and...

- Increased risk of overdose injuries
- Impairment in learning memory and attention
- Increased risk for disorders
- Increased incidence of suicidal ideation
- Increased risk for social anxiety disorder
- Increased risk of substance use disorder





Why is this so much more important for youth?

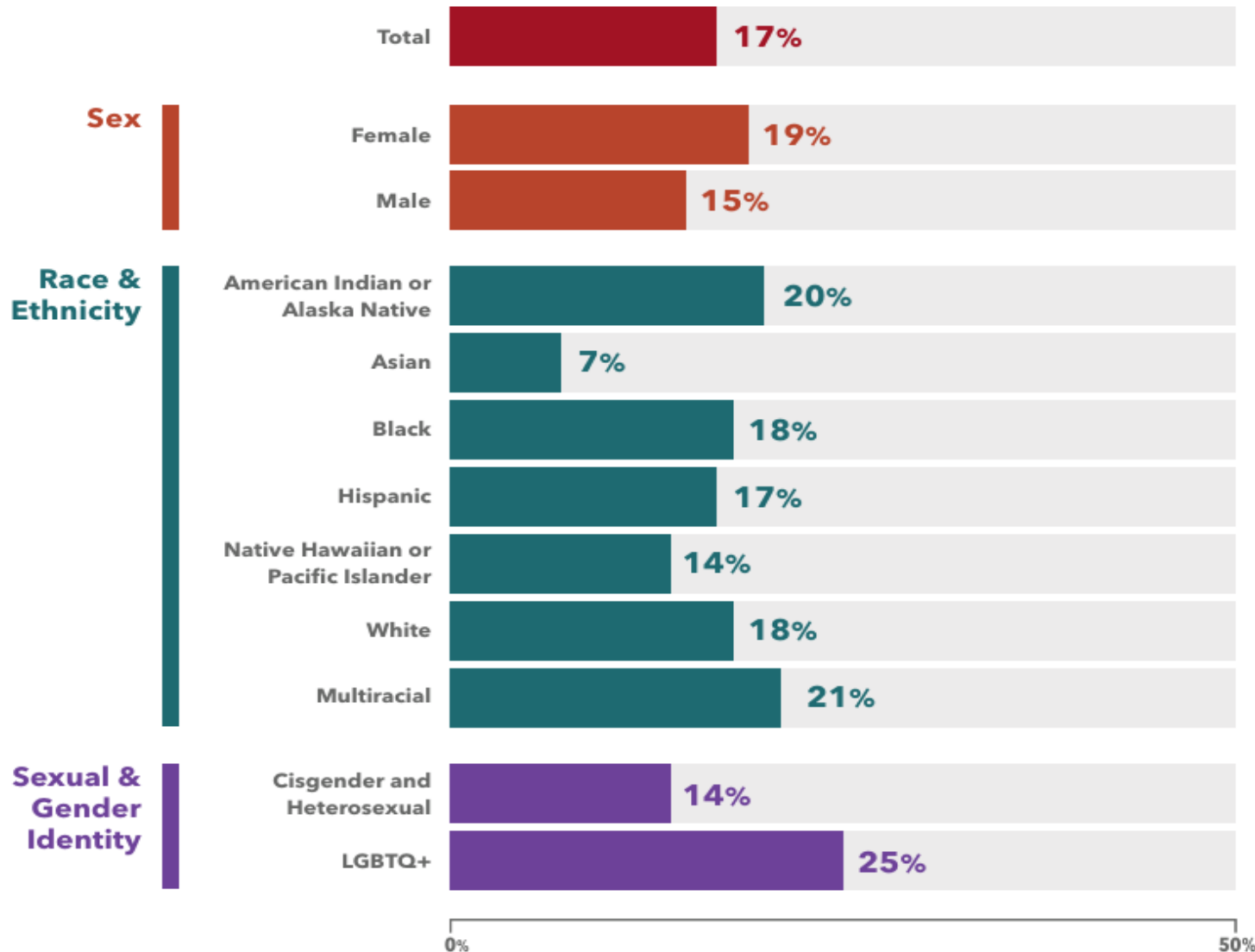


**9 OUT OF 10**

people who develop substance  
use problems started using  
by age 18



Percentage of High School Students Who  
**Used Marijuana** During the Past 30 Days,  
 by Demographic Characteristics, United States, YRBS, 2023



# 2023 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey data

*Represents kids in 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade*

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.).



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## NEWS RELEASES

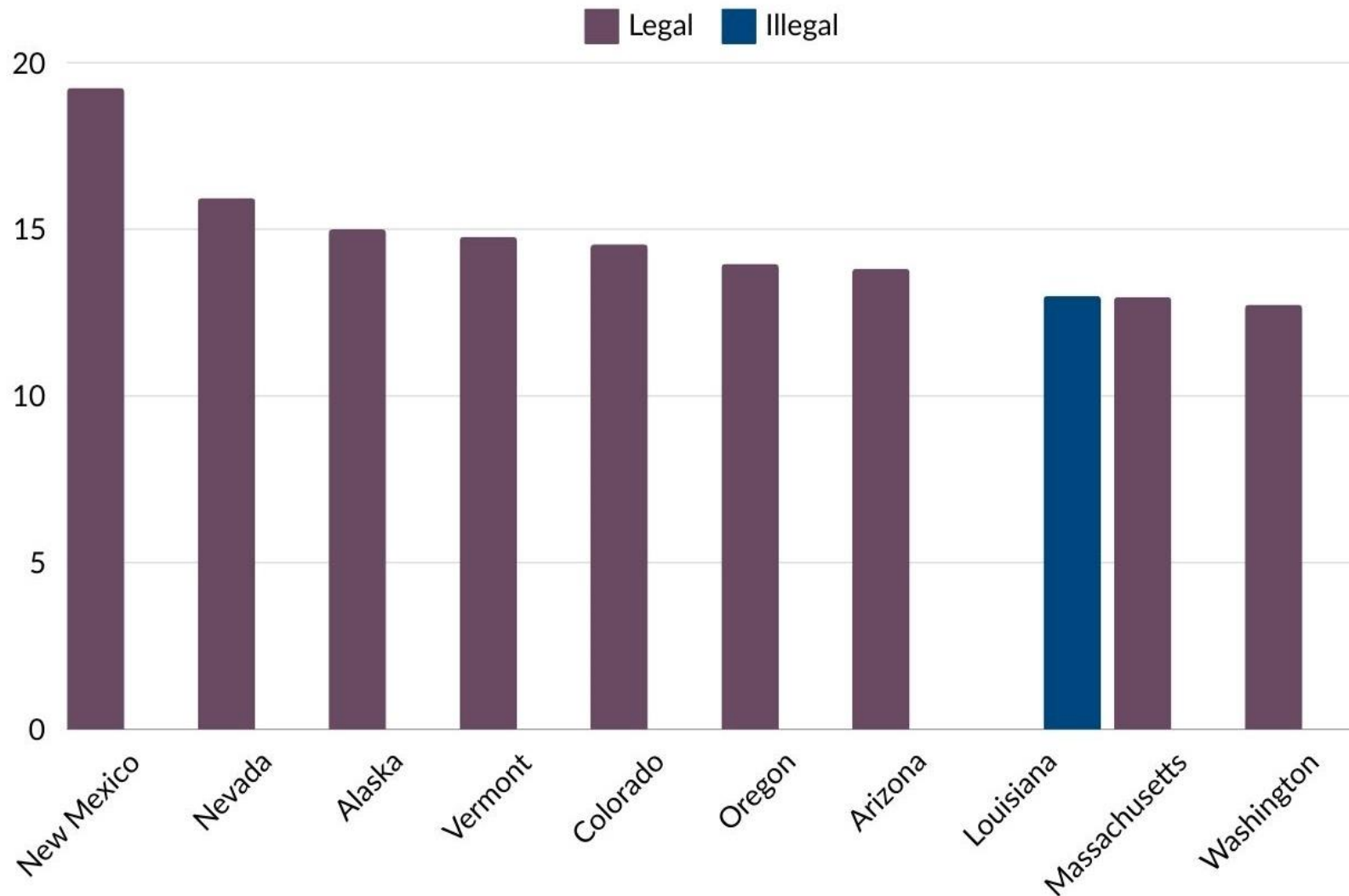
Monday, August 22, 2022

# Marijuana and hallucinogen use among young adults reached all-time high in 2021

*NIH-supported study also found past-month vaping levels rebound after early pandemic drop.*

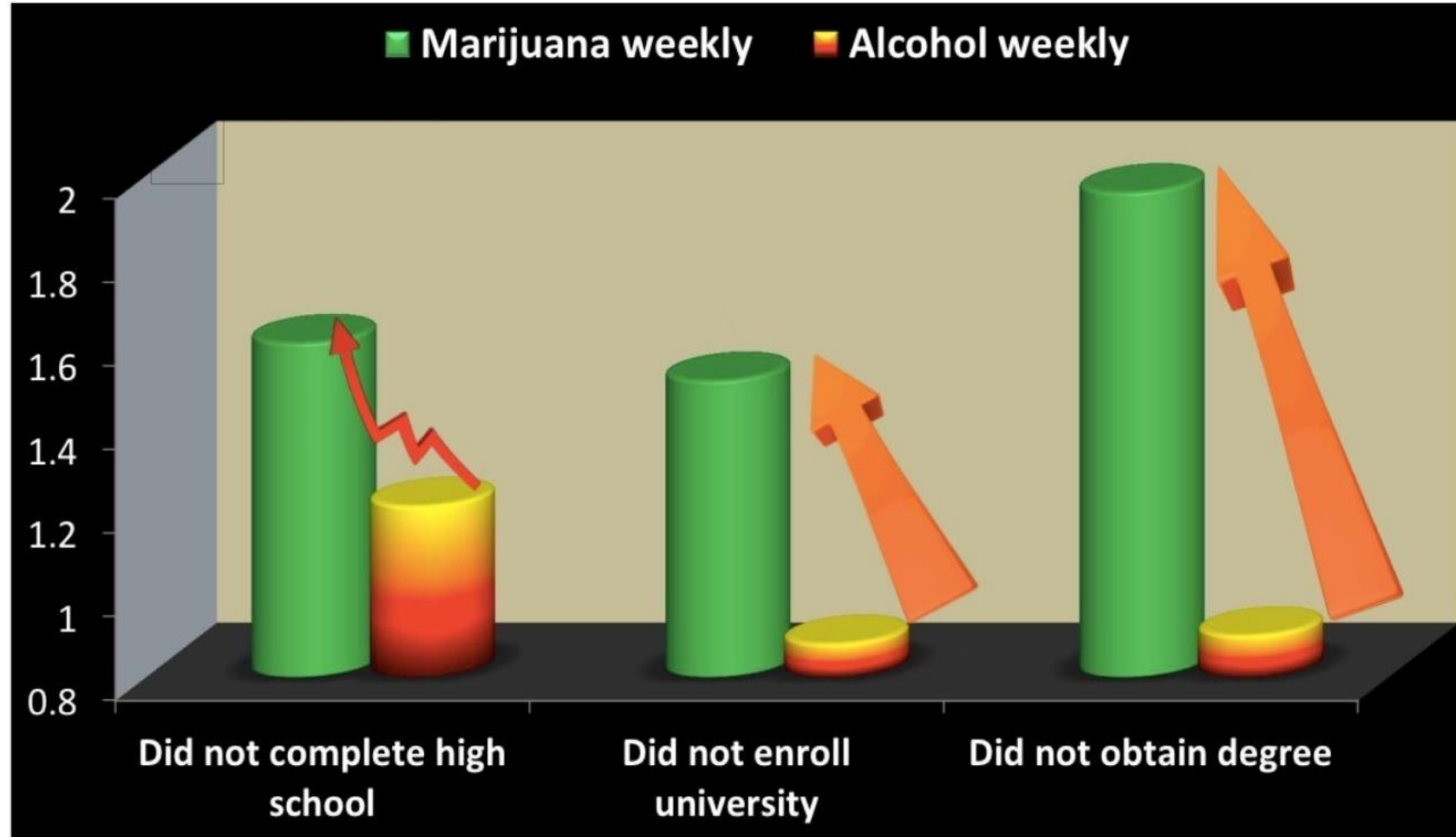
Marijuana and hallucinogen use in the past year reported by young adults 19 to 30 years old increased significantly in 2021 compared to five and 10 years ago, reaching historic highs in this age group since 1988, according to the Monitoring the Future (MTF) panel study. Rates of past-month nicotine vaping, which have been gradually increasing in young adults for the past four years, also continued their general upward trend in 2021, despite leveling off in 2020. Past-month marijuana vaping, which had significantly decreased in 2020, rebounded to pre-pandemic levels in 2021.

# TOP 10 US States with Highest Cannabis Use Rates Among Youth Ages 12-17 in 2021-22.



*Data from SAMHSA 2021-22 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Model Based Estimated Prevalence for States*

# Risk to Academic and Job Potential



E. Silins et al., (2015)

# Your Thoughts



What changes have you seen related to cannabis use, promotion, or availability in the community(ies) you work with?

How is this impacting the way you do your work?



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# Talk to Young People About Cannabis

## A few talking points:

- It is natural to feel curious and have questions about cannabis. We are all are working to better understand today's risks.
- There are health effects and risks unique to youth. Developing brains are at higher risk for developing problem use.
- THC potency is high today – especially oils and concentrates.
- Most teens are NOT using. (use example from your community: “92% of kids age 12-17 in Oklahoma reported not using illicit drugs, including marijuana.” *Ahr. America's Health Rankings.* (n.d.).



# How to Talk to Young People About Cannabis

- Encourage skepticism of the industry and marketing.
- Talk about the facts. Ask them to learn with you if you don't know the answer to their question.
- Help them practice what they will say if offered substances.
- Talk about the goals they have and how substance use can get in the way of them.





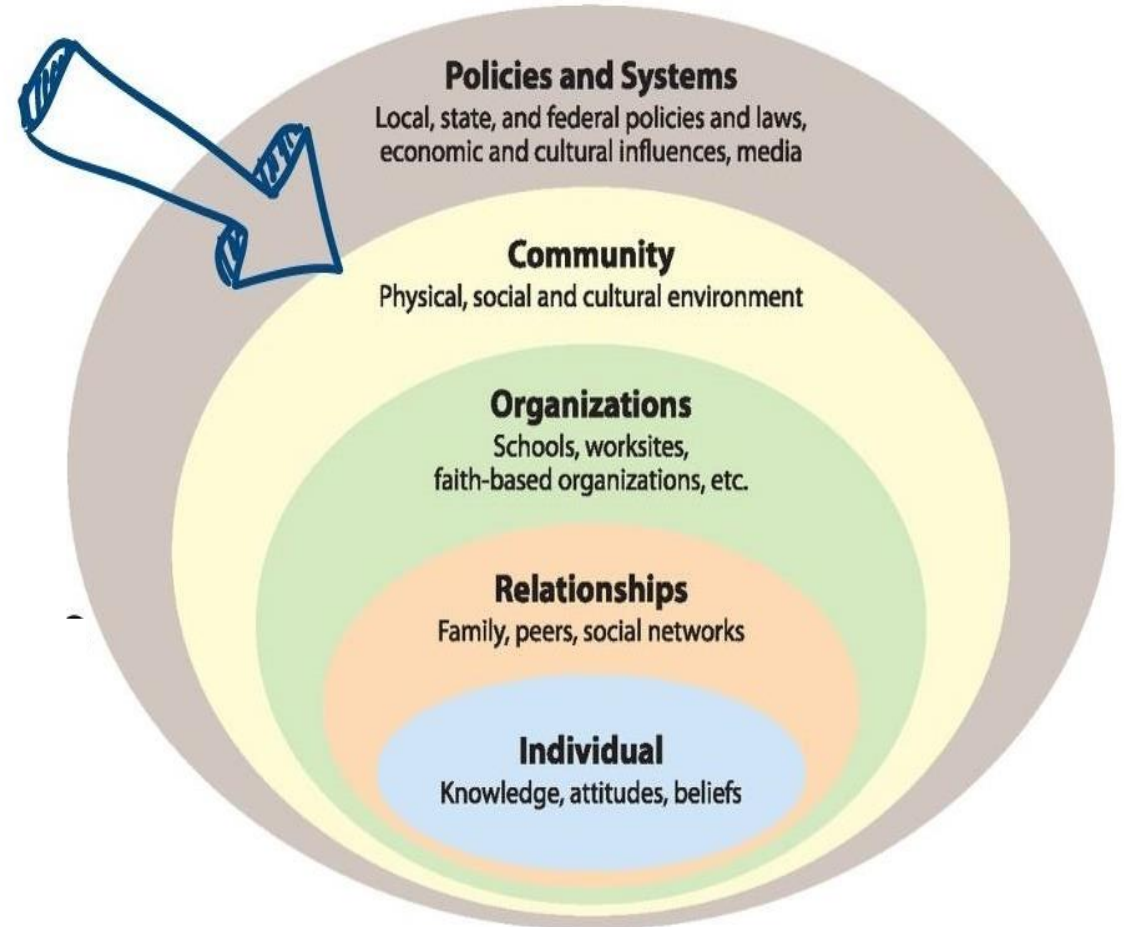
How can we prevent and reduce misuse in communities?



# Community-Level Prevention

## Root causes of youth substance misuse at a community level

- Community normalization of use
- Access to and promotion of substances
- Favorable attitudes about use
- Low perception of harm
- Lack of regulation or enforcement of laws
- Early onset of youth substance use



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# Make the Healthy Choices Easy Choices

## Limit Advertising and Product Exposure:



**“Exposure to marijuana advertisements was associated with higher odds of current marijuana use among adolescents.”**  
(CDC 2017)

**“Regular exposure to marijuana advertising on storefronts, billboards, retailer websites and other locations increased the likelihood of adolescents using marijuana.”**  
*(Journal of Health Communication, 2020)*

**“Density of cannabis retailers is associated with more use and a greater intensity of use among young adults.”**  
(Rand Corp., 2020)

# Strategies to Prevent Youth Initiation and Use

- Buffer for adult-only product sales and advertising
- Establish density maximums
- Prohibit use at youth/family events
- Require clear warnings and disclosures on labels
- Local options tax
- Collect data to monitor policy changes and usage rates
- Create structure to include health in policy decisions

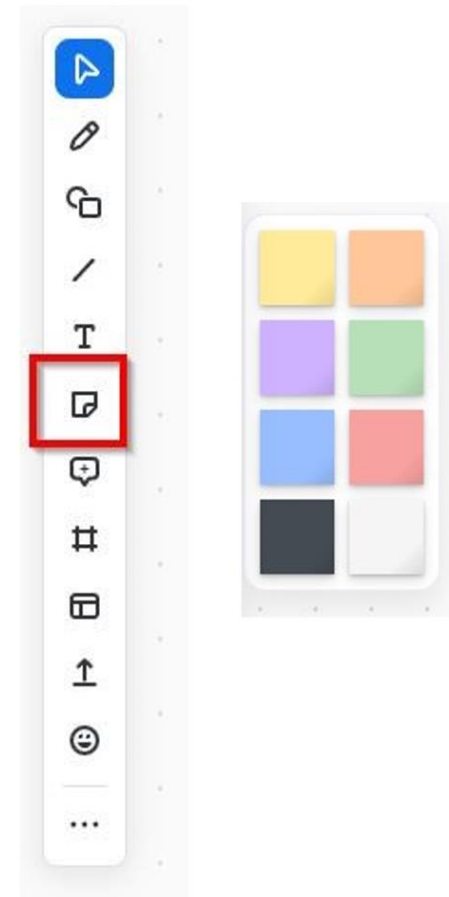
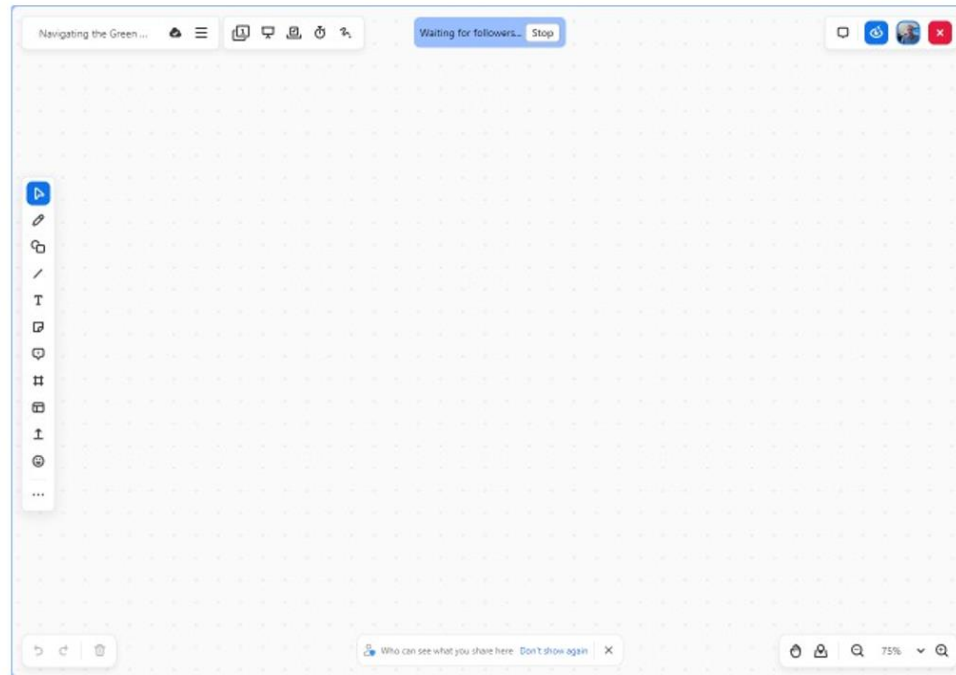


# Shared Values



1. Protect the youth
2. Protect the health of the community
3. Ensure equity and reduce harm to communities impacted by predatory industries and racist systems and structures

When we start the whiteboard on the next slide. Select the sixth icon down (or Shift N) to create a Post-it type box to type your message in. Choose **Yellow for Issues** to improve **Light Blue for Action**



# Next Steps

What is a cannabis related issue in your area you would like to see improve?

What is one simple action step you can take to improve the problem?

**On your own (1 minute)**



# Summary

- The earlier people start using any substance the more likely they are to develop problem use.
- Social norms, access to, and promotion of substances can all increase underage use. Communities can support kids by limiting their exposure to adult-only substances through thoughtful considerations of how advertising, use in public spaces, and density of retailers is allowed in the area.
- The public understanding of the harms of cannabis has not caught up with the research. Increasing awareness of health harms is important prevention work.
- We must work to educate ourselves so we can educate others.

# Resources

## **TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CANNABIS**

[International Academy on the Science and Impact of Cannabis](#)

[Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration](#)

[Centers for Disease Control](#)

[National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)

[PTTC Cannabis Prevention Resources](#)

## **TO TALK WITH KIDS ABOUT CANNABIS**

[Talk. They Hear You from SAMHSA](#)

[Talking Pot with Youth: A Cannabis Communication Guide](#)

[Marijuana Talk Kit from Partnership to End Addiction](#)

[One Chance to Grow UP](#)



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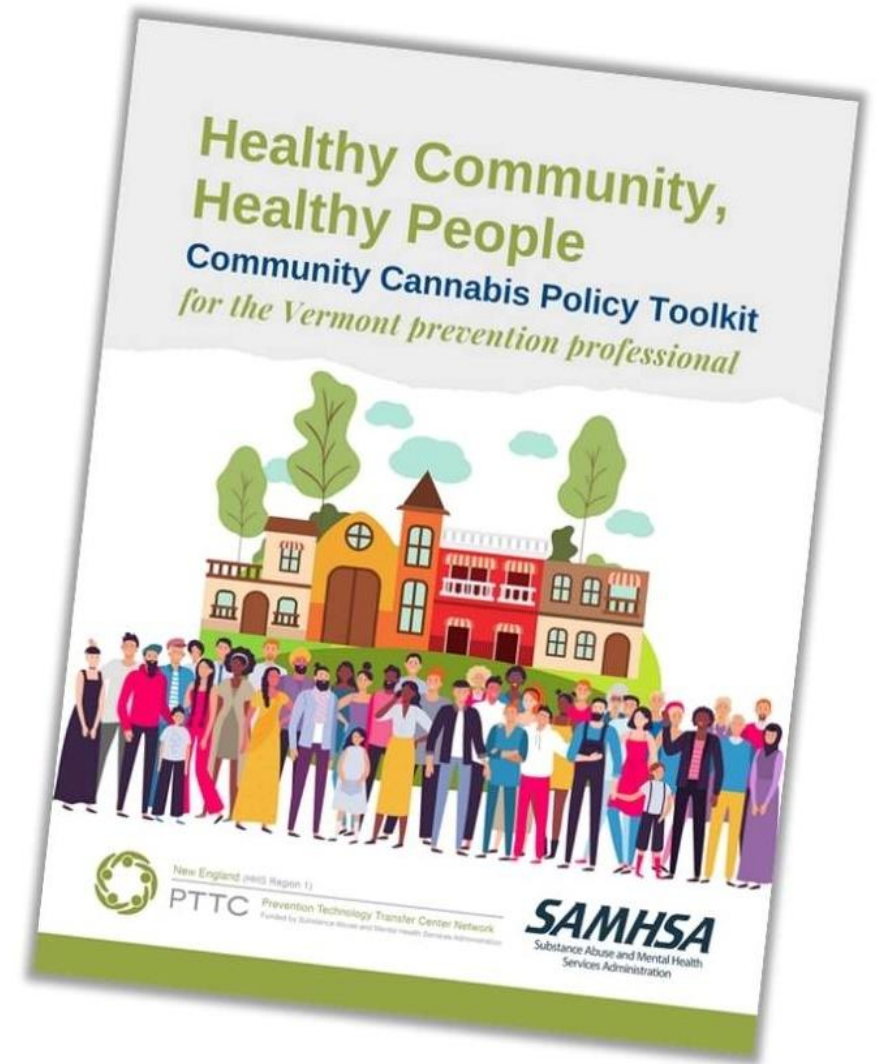
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# My Contact Info:

Mariah@burlingtonpartnership.org

Cannabis Policy Toolkit and two  
template slidedecks on PTTC website  
[here](#)



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For further questions, contact:

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