

Statement of the Vermont Public Health Association Concerning Non-Therapeutic Marijuana in Vermont

The Vermont Public Health Association (VtPHA) views the non-therapeutic use of marijuana as a public health issue and is concerned about its legalization. Marijuana is the most widely used illegal drug in the United States. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, Vermont has one of the highest prevalence rates for marijuana use in the nation, particularly among young adults. Twelve percent of those age 12 and older and nearly 30 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 25 reported using marijuana within the past month. Those under 21 years of age account for 20% of the marijuana use in Vermont. VtPHA is concerned about the legalization of non-therapeutic marijuana in Vermont based on the following public health considerations:

- The effect of legalization on prevalence of use is largely unknown.
- The scientific and public health literature identifies some clear acute and chronic health effects, especially with frequent high doses of marijuana, including increased risks of:
 - impaired cognitive and psychosocial function
 - motor vehicle accidents
 - psychosis and psychotic symptoms
 - chronic bronchitis and chronic airflow obstruction
 - adverse pregnancy outcomes
- There is strong evidence that marijuana use and tobacco use are highly associated, thereby potentially magnifying the documented negative health effects from tobacco use.
- Regular marijuana uses poses a risk of dependence, especially among young people
- Evidence is emerging on the adverse effects of marijuana use on brain development and academic performance in young people

In response to these concerns and the lack of a clear public health benefit to legalization, VtPHA supports a public health approach in dealing with this issue, including:

- Continued research on the health effects of marijuana use
- Monitoring of the effects of legalization of recreational marijuana in other states on prevalence of marijuana use
- Increased funding for comprehensive drug use prevention, and anti-drug marketing and education programs, particularly as it applies to marijuana use among the young.

If Vermont chooses to legalize non-therapeutic marijuana, the VtPHA strongly urges policy makers to consider mandating a comprehensive regulatory regime that would include:

- Usage restrictions: such as restrictions on use in public places, workplaces, and multiunit housing.
- Motor vehicle operation: clear limits on levels of intoxication from marijuana products acceptable for operation of motor vehicles on public roads.
- Youth access barriers: including minimum age of purchase or possession, child resistant packaging, and marketing and sales directed toward youth.
- Marketing and advertising: general restrictions on marketing to avoid promotion or normalizing use through mass media, outdoor advertising, or point-of sale advertising.
- Retailer licensing: a state standard on restrictions for types and numbers of licensed sellers with full local control given to municipalities to go beyond the state mandates, and licensing fees that are sufficient to cover regulation and oversight of the marijuana industry.
- Regulation and enforcement: ensure sufficient State personnel and positions in order to oversee, regulate and enforce all laws and regulations surrounding marijuana growers, distributors and retailers.
- Pricing: taxation levels adequate to pay for education, prevention and treatment around marijuana use.
- Testing and labeling to provide consumers with standard information about dosage levels of products.

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For questions, please contact Brian Flynn, VtPHA Board President at 802-557-2213