



**New Jersey Council of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (NJCCAP)
Policy Statement on Marijuana, Cannabinoids, and Legalization**

There is a growing trend in the United States toward legalization of marijuana for both medical and recreational purposes. With this trend, there has been an increase in marijuana use and a decrease in the public perception of harm associated with marijuana use and addiction. Additionally, the potency of marijuana has increased significantly over the years along with the availability of synthetic cannabinoids and edible forms of marijuana, often ingested by children with dire consequences. There is a lack of public awareness and education around the negative effects of marijuana use and abuse that needs to be addressed. There are particular risks for children and adolescents whose brains are still developing and a lack of research addressed at further understanding the effects of marijuana on children and adolescents. Efforts in public education to alert the public concerning the adverse effects of tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis have been successful when sustained.

There are many well-documented adverse effects of marijuana use such as altered brain development, cognitive impairment, decreased brain activity in areas of the brain and a significant increase in risk of developing psychotic symptoms or disorders. Those with habitual use have a greater risk of decreased academic performance, increased school dropout rates, decreased overall educational attainment and decreased workplace productivity. There are known carcinogens and toxins in marijuana and the long-term risk for developing cancer is unknown. The use of synthetic cannabinoids has led to multiple emergency room visits for paranoia, anxiety, and psychosis. The use of marijuana, particularly in adolescents increases not only the risk of addiction to marijuana, but also the risk of addiction to other substances. There have also been multiple reports of increased driving accidents and fatalities linked to driving while under the influence of marijuana.

There is little funding going toward the education, prevention or treatment of marijuana use and addiction. There is a huge amount of public funds involved in criminal penalties for marijuana use and possession that has disproportionately affected poor and minority communities. This disruption to the lives of these families has been linked to long-term social and economic destabilization. Legalization of marijuana has been proposed as a way of decreasing rates of incarceration and increasing the flow of tax revenues from the regulated sale of marijuana toward funding for education and treatment. However, there is no evidence for this and in states where marijuana has been legalized there have been concerning results such as increased emergency room visits for cannabis toxicity, psychotic reactions, and cannabis diversion to minors.

NJCCAP opposes any legislation that can increase the use of marijuana by adolescents beyond when prescribed for specified medical or research purpose.

As mental health advocates for NJ children and adolescents, **NJCCAP recommends:**

1. **Greater attention** to the public health effects of any change in the legalization of cannabis that includes--
 - a. **Increased research** into the health effects of marijuana
 - b. **Increased research** into the effects of marijuana-related policy changes on child and adolescent mental health
2. **Increased public education** to children and families regarding the known adverse effects of marijuana on youth
3. **Increased attention to the special issues related to children and young adults and immediate access to evidence-based treatment** for marijuana use disorders

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