



Medical Cannabis Provides An Alternative to Opiates

Allowing pain patients to use medical cannabis allows many to reduce or eliminate opiate use.

- A survey of intractable pain patients in Minnesota’s medical cannabis program who had used opiates before enrolling found 63% “were able to reduce or eliminate their opioid use after six months.”¹
- In Michigan, a survey of chronic pain patients found medical cannabis use “was associated with a 64% decrease in opioid use, decreased number and side effects of medications, and an improved quality of life. This study suggests that many [chronic pain] patients are essentially substituting medical cannabis for opioids and other medications for [chronic pain] treatment, and finding the benefit and side effect profile of cannabis to be greater than these other classes of medications.”²
- A study of New Mexicans suffering from chronic pain found enrolling in the state’s medical cannabis program made pain patients significantly “more likely either to reduce daily opioid prescription dosages between the beginning and end of the sample period (83.8 percent versus 44.8 percent) or to cease filling opioid prescriptions altogether (40.5 percent versus 3.4 percent).”³
- A 2016 study found a 48% reduction in patients’ opioid use after three months of medical marijuana treatment.⁴

Medical cannabis laws are associated with reduced opioid prescriptions.

- Doctors in states where marijuana was legal prescribed an average of 1,826 fewer doses of painkillers per year to patients enrolled in Medicare Part D — which would result in a cost savings of up to \$500 million per year if medical marijuana access was legal nationwide.⁵
- A study of Medicaid prescriptions from 2011 to 2016 found a 6% reduction in opioid prescriptions when a state permitted medical marijuana and a further 6% reduction when adult use was allowed.⁶
- In states that passed medical marijuana laws, fewer drivers killed in car crashes tested positive for opioids after the laws went into effect.⁷

No credible studies support the theory that the physical effects of cannabis are a gateway to opiates.

- “There is no evidence that marijuana serves as a stepping stone on the basis of its particular physiological effect.” — Institute of Medicine⁸
- “Overall, research does not support a direct causal relationship between regular marijuana use and

other illicit drug use.” — Drug Enforcement Administration⁹

- The above studies show that for many, medical cannabis is an exit drug — allowing patients to reduce or eliminate their use of more dangerous painkillers, such as opioids.

¹ <https://www.health.state.mn.us/news/pressrel/2018/cannabis030118.html>

² KF Boehnke, et al., “Medical Cannabis Use Is Associated With Decreased Opiate Medication Use in a Retrospective Cross-Sectional Survey of Patients With Chronic Pain,” *Journal of Pain*, June 2016.

³ Jacob Vigil, et al., “Associations between medical cannabis and prescription opioid use in chronic pain patients: A preliminary cohort study,” *PLOSOne*, November 16, 2017.

⁴ Staci Gruber, et al., “Splendor in the Grass? A Pilot Study Assessing the Impact of Medical Marijuana on Executive Function,” *Front. Pharmacol.*, 13 Oct. 2016, Vol. 7.

⁵ Ashley Bradford, et al., “Medical Marijuana Laws Reduce Prescription Medication Use In Medicare Part D,” *Health Aff.*, July 2016.

⁶ Hefei Wen and Jason Hockenberry, “Association of Medical and Adult-Use Marijuana Laws With Opioid Prescribing for Medicaid Enrollees,” *JAMA Intern Med.*, Apr. 2, 2018.

⁷ June Kim, et al., “State Medical Marijuana Laws and the Prevalence of Opioids Detected Among Fatally Injured Drivers,” *Am. J. of Pub. Health*, Nov. 2016, Vol. 106, no. 11.

⁸ Marijuana and Medicine: Assessing the Science, Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences (1999).

⁹ Denial of Petition to Initiate Proceedings to Reschedule Marijuana, Federal Register, Doc. # 2016-17954, 8/12/16.