You Can't Spell Healthcare without "THC"

The impact of medical marijuana legalization on mental health.

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What is Marijuana?

Marijuana, or cannabis, is a plant that incudes chemicals called cannabinoids. Cannabis is known for causing drug-like reactions in the body and can also provide medical effects. Marijuana is psychoactive but not all cannabinoids in the plant give that mind-altering effect on their own. CBD (cannabidiol) and THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) are the most common cannabinoids found in cannabis products. THC is psychoactive - CBD is not.

How about CBD?

CBD

CBD is a non-psychoactive derivative of cannabis and is legal in all states as long as there is less than 0.3% of THC. It provides benefits such as pain management and relaxation. CBD and similar derivatives are regarded as a supplement rather than a primary pharmaceutical replacement. Insomnia and muscle pain are the most common uses for CBD, along with anxiety management.

Delta 8, Delta 9, and Other Derivatives

Psychoactive forms of marijuana that are legal tend to produce better effects for mental health management but it is severely under-researched. Most people self-medicate leading to misuse and adverse effects. As explained in the following pages, there are significant benefits to current legal cannabis options but they are unregulated for the benefits of mental health care. States that have legalized medical marijuana tend to have better mental health care and resources than those that self-medicate with lesser regulated legal options such as delta 8 and 9.

Delta 8 THC

What is Delta 8 THC?

Delta 8 is a psychoactive form of cannabis that is legal in most states under the Farm Bill. It is rumored to be less potent than traditional marijuana but chemically provides a similar effect. The most apparent difference between the two is that the euphoric effects of traditional marijuana are not as present in Delta 8.

Pain Management

Delta 8 is commonly taken as a substitute for pain medications as it provides a similar feeling of relief. Chemotherapy patients say that their side effects from the treatment are reduced, especially nausea and overall oain.

Relaxation and Reducing Anxiety

Similar to CBD - but at a much larger scale - relaxation and anxiety reducing effects are often a result of consuming delta 8. According to an online study, a third of delta 8 users report that they use deta 8 as a anxiety management tool.

Replacement of Pharmaceuticals

In a study conducted by The Conversation, delta 8 was preferred by people who use medication because side effects are limited and often delta 8 provides the same benefits. Delta 8 was also preferred over other THC products because there is the ability to perform tasks due to a lack of "mind-altering" effects.

Delta 9 THC

What is Delta 9 THC?

Delta 9 is also a psychoactive form of cannabis that is legal in most states under the Farm Bill. This cannabinoid is considered the elevated aspect of traditional marijuana and is more potent than delta 8. To recap - marijuana is the form of cannabis that includes all forms of naturally occurring THC - including both delta 8 and delta 9. There are other forms of THC that are chemically manmade such as delta 10 and THCV.

Euphoric and Uplifting Effects

Delta 9 is incredibly psychoactive leading to an uplifted, giddy effect. The most common characteristic is inability to stop laughing. With therapy, delta 9 has been known to overall increase mood. The cannabinoid has only been derived and sold for a short time so not enough research has been conducted on longer term affects separately from THC.

Productivity and Energy

Delta 9 is a sativa by nature which tends to give the user increased energy while also increasing mood. Delta 9 often allows for the user to complete small tasks that would otherwise be overwhelming. Those with mental health issues like Major Depressive Disorder struggle to do chores and take care of themselves. Delta 9 is a beneficial in completing those tasks.

Side Effects and Complications

Though delta 9 can be uplifting and a depression management tool, those with anxiety conditions may have upsetting side effects. Because delta 9 is the most potent part of cannabis, it can cause paranoia and increased anxiety. Some people do not experience these side effects. In terms of mental health care, everything should be considered before taking delta 9.

Mental Illness

Nearly one in five U.S. adults live with a mental illness. This can include everything from depression to psychiatric conditions such as bipolarity. A study by Princeton estimates that 60% of those adults are not being treated for their disorders. A lack of treatment often leads to long-term consequences and higher rates of suicide. ***45,979*** Americans died by suicide in 2020, with another ***1.2 million*** attempts. Suicide is a preventable event with proper care and support - something that is lacking worldwide.

Mental Health and Drug Use

High Rates of Misuse

Princeton estimates that 40% of patients with schizophrenia and 20% of patients with major depressive disorder or bipolar disorder are diagnosed with cannabis use disorder. Other unmonitored and illegal drug use is present in higher numbers among those with mental health conditions.

Self-Medication

According to an article written on *Molecular Psychiatry*, between 20-60% of people with mental health conditions are resistant to pharmaceutical medication. Consequently, these people tend to self-medicate to mitigate symptoms. The following is cannabis use by disorder in non-regulated states: 80% of people with schizophrenia, 17% of people with major depressive disorder, and 24% of people with bipolar disorder.

50% **of all people with mental health disorders suffer from drug misuse of any kind.**

Legality in the US

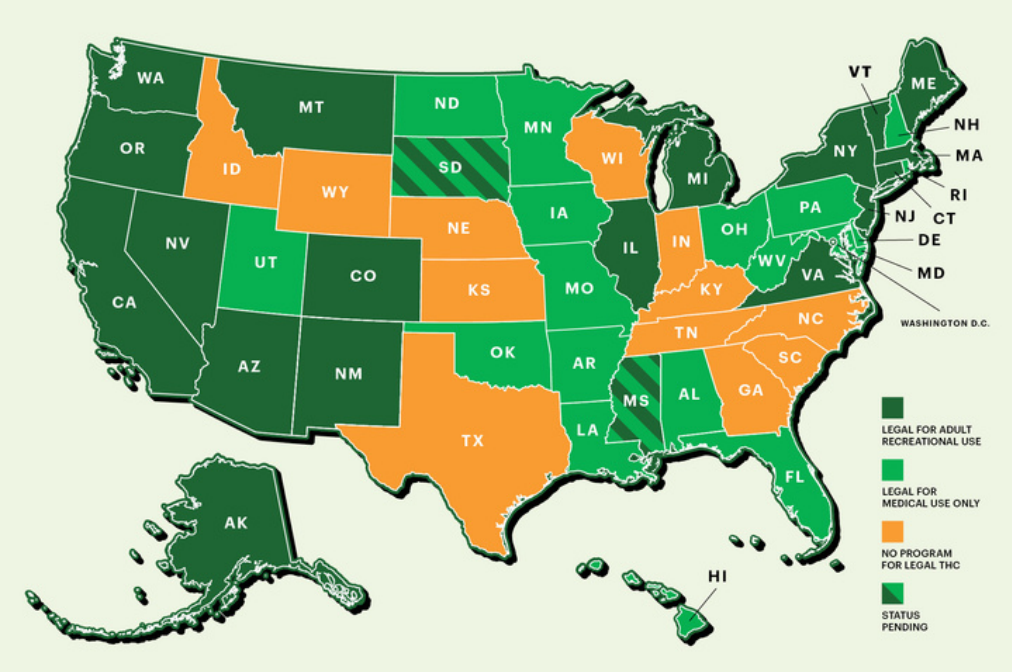


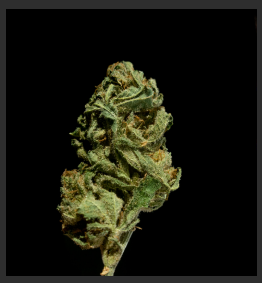
Image provided by Rolling Stone, 4/2021

MEDICAL
18 states

Medical marijuana requires a prescription from a licensed professional. Some illness that qualify for a medical card include: cancer, AIDS, and Chronic pain. Mental health disorders can be advocated for and are frequently granted.

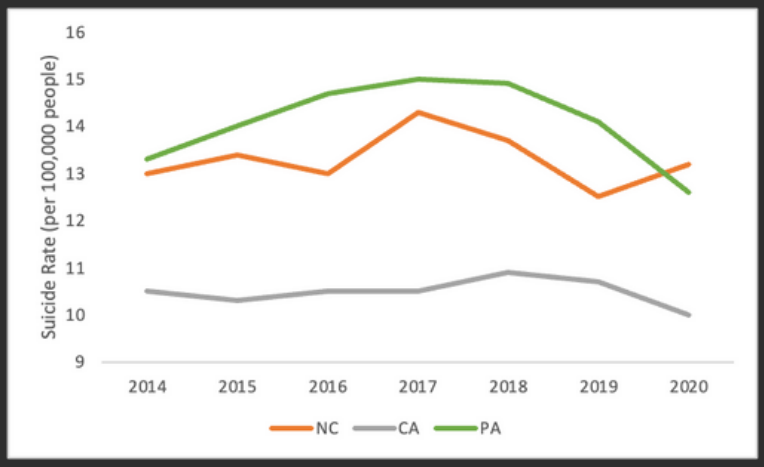
RECREATIONAL
18 states

Recreational legality means that these states allow for the purchase and sale of marijuana that is regulated and inspected by the state. Some place do require medical cards but marijuana can still be obtained legally for recreational use. The benefits for mental health include an ease of access for those that cannot afford prescription medications.



PENDING OR NO PROGRAM
14 states

If a state is in "pending" status or does not have a structured program for cannabis products, people can be charged for possession and sale of marijuana products. These states have loopholes in the form of other cannabinoids and CBD, but are unregulated and have more street sales than medical or recreational states.



What are the impacts at a state level?

A quick case study of a medically legal, a recreationally legal, and a fully illegal states in a side-by-side comparison:

Pennsylvania

Medical

Legalized **medically** in ***2016***

12.6
per 100,000 people

2020 suicide rate

Since legalization in 2016, the suicide rate in Pennsylvania decreased by over 2 people per 100,000. In 2020 - that would mean that the amount of people that succumbed to mental health issues decreased by...

256
people per year.

California

Recreational

Legalized **medically** in ***1996***
Legalized **recreationally** in in ***2016***

10
per 100,000 people

2020 suicide rate

California's suicide rate is lower than all illegal states and exclusively medically legal states. Though recreational legality has implications of drug-related crime and violent crime, there seems to be a correlation between lower suicide rates and access to medical options outside of pharmaceuticals such as cannabis.

North Carolina

Illegal

13.2
per 100,000 people

2020 suicide rate

Cannabis products that ***ARE*** legal:

- *CBD*
- *Delta 8*
- *Delta 9*
- *Delta 10*
- *HHC & more*

North Carolina is an interesting state to use as a case study because it relies on the farm bill. This allows for the sale of cannabis products as long as they contain 0.3% of THC, making many psychoactive products legal and often under-regulated. The suicide rate is higher than both other states but has been inconsistent the past 5 years.

Suicide Isn't Dope

There are many significant factors that contribute to mental health management by state. Pharmaceutical accessibility, counseling resources, and overall quality of life are all contributors to mental illness. What is significant about this evaluation is that states that have some form of legalization of cannabis have lower deaths attributed to suicide or mental health. This is not an indicator of a mass legalization of marijuana but rather a critical look on assumed alternative styles of healthcare and their benefits. The most important factor is safety; if people are smoking anyway to resolve their health issues dependent on the inadequacy of healthcare, then the legal system should be providing harm reduction at the very least.

15.63
per 100,000 people

Average suicide rate in states that are exclusively **medical.**

15.77
per 100,000 people

Average suicide rate in states that are fully **recreational and medical**.

17.65
per 100,000 people

Average suicide rate in states that are **fully illegal.**

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