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Is Legalizing Medical Marijuana Worth It?

With thirty-six states now having legalized medical marijuana, it has become one of the most popular controversial topics. The reasoning behind the controversy is because everyone knows marijuana as a “drug of abuse” but more recently has been pushed by users to legalize because it is a good form of medicine that they shouldn’t be penalized for using. With the legalizing of medical marijuana brings many negative stereotypes that have come about such as marijuana being a gateway drug and how it can become addictive over time. Negative stereotypes come with almost any given topic, however that doesn’t mean the positives are invalid. There are many positives that come with the legalization that many people may not be informed about such as allowing people with health conditions to open up to a new form of medicine, an increase in tax revenue, and creating new job opportunities. After the furthering analysis of the benefits that legalizing medical marijuana brings, one may understand why it’s beneficial.

Let’s start with the background of medical marijuana and how it got where it is today. Before being able to understand the benefits of medical marijuana, you need to be informed about what it is and its origins. Marijuana comes from a plant that is composed of four hundred different chemicals and sixty of which are named cannabinoids (Borowicz et al). These sixty out of four hundred chemicals have what’s called delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol otherwise known as

THC in them. The THC in the marijuana is what's going to give the user the effect and help ease their pain in which they are treating.

Marijuana usage has been around for over a decade. After the Prohibition ended in the 1930s, Harry Anslinger, who was the Director of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, led a movement to demonize marijuana (Mathre and Wilson). His actions resulted in the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937 being passed which imposed taxation on the cannabis and became excluded from the United States Pharmacopoeia by 1941 (Mathre and Wilson). Years later the Controlled Substance Act (CSA) was passed by Congress in 1970 to establish a mechanism to regulate psychoactive drugs. They were divided into five levels (Schedule 1 being the most restrictive to Schedule 5 being the least) based on their medical usefulness, potential for abuse, and protection of use under medical overseeing (Mathre and Wilson).

Congress decided that marijuana fit into the category of Schedule 1 which means that the drug is said to be highly addictive and not acceptable for medical use. Many people started to speak up and question this issue saying that marijuana was wrongly categorized into Schedule 1 (Mathre and Wilson). President Nixon had people look further into marijuana to understand what it is and evaluate its usage, but even after giving Nixon the findings he wouldn't change the law and marijuana remained illegal for medical use. Then, in 1981 medical marijuana usage took a positive turn when Robert Randall and his wife created the Alliance for Cannabis Therapeutics also known as ACT (Mathre and Wilson). The point of this alliance was to try and help assist others in obtaining legal marijuana access for medical use. Randall who has glaucoma started growing and using marijuana because he claimed it was the only thing that was able to take his pain away (Mathre and Wilson).

As years went on there were new advancements on medical marijuana almost everyday discovering how it can be useful for all different types of health conditions. In 1999, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) published a study on cannabis's possible therapeutic uses which was a huge push forward (Mathre and Wilson). The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine published a study in early 2017 focused on an analysis of over 10,000 scientific abstracts related to marijuana medical research. They also came up with a hundred health-related findings and suggestions on how to boost marijuana research which leads us up to where we stand today about the medical use of marijuana (Mathre and Wilson).

Now that we covered the basis of what medical marijuana is and how it got where it is today, let's move onto the benefits of legalizing medical marijuana starting with how it can help people with an abundance of different health conditions. The main reason why people with health conditions use marijuana for medical use is the ease pain. The two main components within marijuana that give the patients the pain easing affect is THC and CBD (Grinspoon). When people first hear about marijuana being used for medical purposes they assume there is only one way of using it which is smoking it, but there is actually many different forms of intaking medical marijuana. Some of them include capsules, patches, edibles, flower, oils, and even lotions.

When it comes to medical use of marijuana there are many negative stereotypes but most are proven to be false. For example, marijuana is said to be a "gateway drug" however this is a myth. Using marijuana the proper way will not make a person want to try any hard drugs (Mathre and Wilson). Another stereotype that many people assume about marijuana is that it can become addictive but this is a false statement and here's why. Marijuana does not include any

ingredients that can give the addictive affect like other drugs such as cocaine. Studies show that marijuana is one of the least addictive “drugs” (Mathre and Wilson).

After studies being done at Harvard University, it showed that medical marijuana has an ingredient that has the potential to suppress tumor growth in lung cancer and greatly reduce the risk of spreading (Borowicz et al). These ingredients go by the name CB1 and CB2. Patients with lung cancer who use medical marijuana can also find other benefits from it such as helping with nausea and vomiting. Another health condition that the use of medical marijuana would be beneficial for is glaucoma. Glaucoma is an eye condition that can lead to blindness. The ingredient CB2 in medical marijuana is said to help with retinal circulation and decrease pressure in the eyes (Borowicz et al).

HIV and AIDS is a very serious and deadly disease that unfortunately has no cure, everyday doctors try to look for ways to help with the symptoms and medical marijuana has been discovered to be one of them. Medical marijuana was first discovered to help with HIV and AIDS patients back in 1986. By using medical marijuana for HIV and AIDS patients it has shown that it can delay the progressiveness of the disease and help with complications (Borowicz et al). Some of the complications can include fever, herpes outbreaks, energy loss, dry skin, memory loss, and loss of weight.

Inflammatory Bowel Disease also known as IBD is another disease that medical use of marijuana can treat. Some of the symptoms of IBD can include stomach pain, severe cramp, muscle aches, vomiting, diarrhea, and loss of weight (Borowicz et al). Patients started testing using medical cannabis for an eight week time period to see if they saw any positive changes and

90% of the patients said they did and had no negative side effects (Borowicz et al). The testing showed that some of the positive changes included gaining weight and rise of BMI.

Not only can medical marijuana help with physical health conditions but studies show that it can also be beneficial for people with mental illnesses (Grinspoon). A study was done on veterans returning home from combat with PTSD to see if the medical use of marijuana would help with their condition. The results of the study showed a tremendous amount of improvement and a want to push for the government to give more opportunities for medical marijuana studies (Grinspoon). Medical marijuana use has also been shown to help other mental illnesses such as anxiety and ADHD.

Now that we have discussed all the different health conditions that medical marijuana is beneficial for, let's move onto the economic benefits that legalizing medical marijuana brings starting with how it can increase tax revenue. In the article "High Economy: Impacts of Marijuana Legalization on the US Economy" written by Charles Zha he states "According to the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration, the cannabis industry brings \$411.3 million in excise tax, \$98.9 million in cultivation tax, and \$335.1 million in sales tax, totaling to \$845.3 million in tax revenue for the third quarter of 2019". The distribution of these taxes are specifically stated in Proposition 64 (Zha). First it goes to marijuana enforcement agencies and operating expenses. Then, sixty percent of the surplus is put into childhood education and precaution which can include presentations and guest speakers who can go to public schools to talk about marijuana and safety. Environmental control and law enforcement including both local and state each get twenty percent of the tax (Zha).

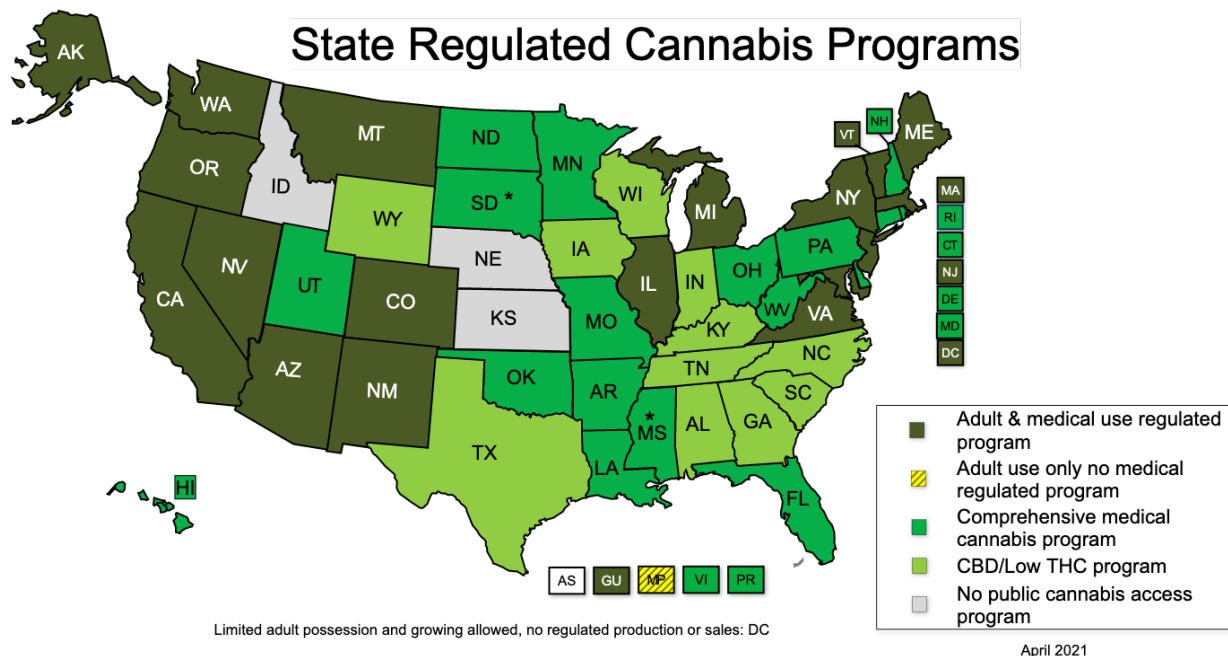
That is just one prime example of a state that legalized medical marijuana and look how much they benefitted from it. Many states that continue to start legalizing medical marijuana are following in the same footsteps. Every aspect of the economy is able to be positively impacted by the tax revenue that was produced from the legalization. Most people that aren't informed about the tax revenue that medical marijuana produces are quick to have the negative thought that all the money and tax made from medical marijuana industries just goes into the pockets of the industries but that is not the case. The money goes to all parts of the economy so everyone is able to benefit even young childhood in elementary schools and supply them with the proper knowledge about marijuana from professionals.

Another aspect of the economy that can benefit from the legalization of medical marijuana is an increase in job opportunities. Especially now as we are in a pandemic many people are left without jobs and has the economy in a downturn. With legalizing marijuana, it can open up so many job opportunities to people who may be stuck in this very situation. In the article "Cannabis Legalization Is Key To Economic Recovery, Much Like Ending Alcohol Prohibition Helped Us Out Of The Great Depression", Kris Krane states "The cannabis industry currently employs nearly 250,000 full time jobs more than four times the number of coal industry workers in the country, and the same number of jobs estimated to have been lost by the ratification of the 18th Amendment that outlawed alcohol production and sales".

When most people hear about jobs for a cannabis industry they are not sure what type of jobs are included. Yes, there are jobs in the retail aspect of it but there are also an abundance of other job types in the industry including health professionals, lawyers, data analysts, and marketing jobs which all together equals a total labor income of \$260,732,000 (Zha). Author

Kris Krane states “According to the recent study by New Frontier Data, national legalization in the United States could result in \$128.8 billion in tax revenue, and an estimated 1.6 million new jobs”.

Everyday each state is making steps in the right direction to legalizing medical marijuana which will result in society being able to access all of these benefits. To give you a visual of where each state stands today with the legalization of marijuana here is a state regulated cannabis programs map.



Garcia, Alise. “State Medical Marijuana Laws.” *NCSL, National Conference of State Legislatures* , 5 Apr. 2021, www.ncsl.org/research/health/state-medical-marijuana-laws.aspx.

Overall, the legalization of medical marijuana can open up society to so many benefits both medically and economically. The benefits can help so many different groups of society including young children, law enforcement, people with health conditions, people who are left jobless, and even state and federal government. As research continues more and more new

benefits are discovered everyday and stereotypes are getting proven to be false. Medical marijuana can be the next best way to get the economy back on track during this tragic pandemic. Now after further analyzation about the benefits of medical marijuana, do you think legalizing medical marijuana is worth it?

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