

Jeff Hanley Bio

Jeff Hanley serves as the Executive Director of the Commonwealth Prevention Alliance, a statewide nonprofit that supports prevention professionals in reducing substance misuse and risk related behaviors. After graduating from the University of Mount Union (Ohio), Jeff began working in the nonprofit sector with the American Red Cross. After the Red Cross, he spent 14 years, at the Mercer County Behavioral Health Commission, as a prevention specialist and supervisor. Jeff and his wife Carrie (Director, Healthcare-Associated Infection Prevention Division at the PA Department of Health) reside in State College, PA.

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How Legalization of Adult Use Marijuana will Impact Children and Youth

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To: Health Committee Members

Thank you, Representative Frankel, Representative Rapp, and the members of the Health Committee and Subcommittee for this opportunity to testify. It's time for an honest conversation around marijuana legalization and how it can adversely impact youth and our communities.

For 47 years, the Commonwealth Prevention Alliance (CPA) has focused on advocating for essential substance use/misuse prevention priorities while supporting the professionals who do this important work across the state of Pennsylvania. For the past four years, I have served as the Executive Director of CPA. However, I'm certainly not new to the world of prevention as I spent approximately 20 years in field including at the Mercer County (PA) Single County Authority as a prevention specialist and supervisor. I also worked as the Special Projects Administrator of Opioid Programs, at the Jefferson County Public Health Department, Golden, Colorado.

Before legalizing recreational marijuana, can PA ensure the following safety measures? If not, let's hold off until we receive more data from legalized states.

Youth Protection

1. Youth use will not increase
2. Prohibit concentrates
3. Establish a low THC ceiling
4. Prohibit any product deemed appealing to youth and children (edibles, candies, gummies, etc.)
5. Legal for 21+, preferably 25+ years old
6. Establish advertising guidelines and address social media marketing to youth
7. Accidental overdoses will not increase
8. THC poison control calls will not increase with kids

Safe Communities

1. Provide a local opt in or local opt out
2. Ensure the public health and safety of our communities will not be impacted due to legalization
3. Ensure that positive THC tests in fatal car crashes are will not become more common than positive tests for alcohol

4. Ensure safe roads and highways
 - Provide an effective test for DUI and training of law enforcement
 - Sufficient funding, resources, and expertise for enforcement of cannabis laws.
 - Policies and practices to ensure that enforcement operations and priorities are not influenced by revenue or cannabis industry pressures
 - Clear enforcement guidelines and protocols to ensure fair and consistent enforcement
 - Publicly available and accessible records management system tracking enforcement actions
 - Inclusion in such a system of data by income, race, sex, and location to facilitate public monitoring of equity in enforcement practices
5. Protect pregnant women from use and predatory marketing
6. Include cannabis provisions in social host laws and clean air laws
7. Ensure this will not negatively impact the overdose epidemic and dissuade people who currently use drugs from evidence-based treatments like methadone and buprenorphine
8. Ensure the elimination of the black market

Effective Regulations

1. Require child proof packaging, plain packaging with no branding, warning labels, labels clearly and truthfully detailing the CBD/THC ratio
2. Prohibit sales of these products to outlets within 1,500 feet of schools
3. Create cannabis scientific board to approve or reject health claims and ads.
 - This board should be void of any cannabis lobbyists and cannabis companies

Prevention Efforts

1. Fully fund prevention efforts to state and local entities for:
 - Mass-reach interventions
 - Substance use prevention
 - Counter-marketing
 - Media campaigns
 - Address adult use to reduce youth risk factors

The Commonwealth Prevention Alliance opposes the legalization of recreational marijuana for the following reasons.

1. **Increase access to and use of marijuana among adolescents**, specifically to vulnerable populations like those with predisposed addictive disorder, youth, pregnant women, and marginalized communities.
2. Marijuana is **addictive** and can interfere with brain development and worsen mental health conditions.¹
3. Recent studies add significantly to the evidence that marijuana use in adolescents has **adverse effects on mental health** with risk for depression, psychosis, and cognitive impairment, especially inhibitory control (*also known as response inhibition, permitting an individual to inhibit their impulses to select more appropriate behaviors consistent with one's goals*).²
4. **Safety should focus on high potency and road safety (over and over, state lab tests have disproven police claims of cannabis suspected of contamination⁴)**. A new

analysis suggests that among adolescent marijuana users, smoking marijuana has become less prevalent, eclipsed by vaping and edibles. In addition, those who vaped THC (tetrahydrocannabinol, the main psychoactive compound in marijuana) or consumed edibles were more likely to use marijuana daily.³

¹ <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/marijuana-addictive>

² Morin JG, Afzali MH, Bourque J, et al. A population-based analysis of the relationship between substance use and adolescent cognitive development. *Am J Psychiatry*. 2019;176:98-

³ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2763823>

⁴ <https://www.leafly.com/news/health/leafly-investigation-fentanyl-laced-marijuana-is-a-myth-its-time-to-end-the-hype>

Pennsylvania must thoroughly review the credible and available research regarding the impacts and consequences of youth and adult marijuana use/misuse on mental health, community safety, and substance use disorder.

We are still in the midst of the overdose epidemic. Vaping use is increasing substantially and marijuana or alcohol are the #1 substance of choice of PA youth. Adolescents today have grown up thinking marijuana is medicinal, “only” a plant, and not addictive. Mental health issues continue to increase at an alarming rate, impacting the overall behavioral health of youth and young adults. Prevention organizations, coalitions, and professionals are attempting to effectively prevent and address these issues with youth, young adults, and adults in their community. Legalizing and introducing recreational marijuana are counterintuitive to the health and safety of PA communities.

Youth Products and Use

How exactly are most youth using marijuana? As mentioned, analysis suggests that among adolescent marijuana users, smoking marijuana has become less prevalent, eclipsed by vaping and edibles. In addition, those who vaped THC or consumed edibles were more likely to use marijuana daily.⁵ Marijuana potency has increased in the past decades, up from about 4% in the 1980s to an average of 15% today. Marijuana extracts, used in dabbing and edibles, can contain an average of 50% and up to 90% THC.

Edibles are food products infused with marijuana like gummi’s, chocolate bars, beverages, etc. The effects from smoking marijuana only takes minutes, however, edibles take much longer because food is absorbed into the bloodstream through the liver. Because it takes longer, the user may end up consuming larger amounts of the edible while thinking it isn't working.

- In Colorado, emergency room visits tied to marijuana have risen dramatically since legalization. People using edibles suffered toxic reactions, including cardiac and psychiatric problems, at much higher rates than those smoking marijuana.⁷
- There were more than 11,100 calls to US poison control centers related to marijuana use in 2019, up from about 8,200 in 2017.⁸
- More and more of those calls are related to manufactured products (edibles) that contain distilled amounts of THC.⁹

⁴ [https://www.pccd.pa.gov/Juvenile-Justice/Pages/Pennsylvania-Youth-Survey-\(PAYS\)-2019.aspx](https://www.pccd.pa.gov/Juvenile-Justice/Pages/Pennsylvania-Youth-Survey-(PAYS)-2019.aspx)

⁵ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2763823>

⁷ <https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M18-2809>

^{8/9} Julia Dilley, PhD, epidemiologist, Oregon Public Health Division, Portland; Linda Richter, PhD, vice president, prevention research and analysis, Partnership to End Addiction; Paul Armentano, deputy director, NORML; JAMA Network Open, May 24, 2021

Vaping and Dabbing are methods of ingesting cannabis oil extracts and popular with youth.

- The use of high-potency concentrates, like those found in vape pens also correlates with a higher incidence of mental and physical health problems and may lead to a higher risk of developing acute adverse effects, such as paranoia, psychosis, and cannabis hyperemesis syndrome.¹⁰
- According to the Pennsylvania Youth Survey, vaping marijuana has increased in 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th graders since 2015.¹¹
 - In 2015, 8.6% of students reported vaping marijuana
 - In 2017, 12.6% of students reported vaping marijuana
 - In 2019, 26.6% of students reported vaping marijuana

Legalization advocates continue to tell us it's "just" a plant. Edibles are manufactured and are NOT a plant. So, it's important to know that youth favor the high potency products and continue to vape, dab, and consume edibles.

Youth Mental Health

We are all aware of the mental health crisis impacting our youth. "Adolescence is a critical period, with increased risk for cannabis use, and; in particular, high THC potency cannabis use. This may represent a public health crisis", Dr. Christopher Hammond, MD, PhD.¹²

Early onset of cannabis use, according to Hammond, could lead to a number of health issues, including major depressive disorder, alcohol use disorders, substance use disorders, suicidality, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorders, psychosis, and delinquent behaviors.¹³

"There appears to be a relatively consistent pattern of findings showing that adolescent cannabis use is associated in a dose dependent manner with poor outcomes in academic and occupational functioning, cognition, and psychiatric and substance use outcomes, and that these may be worse for young people with mental health problems," said Hammond.¹³

Adolescent cannabis use could also lead to potential long-term brain effects, like dysfunction in white matter tracts, altered brain waves, and decreased brain blood flow. These effects are larger and more consistent with earlier age of onset and heavy use.¹³

¹⁰ Prince MA, Conner BT. Examining links between cannabis potency and mental and physical health outcomes. *Behav Res Ther* 2019;115:111–20

¹¹ <https://www.pccd.pa.gov/JuvenileJustice/Documents/2019%20PAYS/State%20of%20Pennsylvania%20Profile%20Report.Final.pdf>

¹² Christopher J. Hammond, MD, PhD, 2021 Annual Psychiatric Times™ World CME Conference

¹³ Morgan CJ, Gardener C, Schafer G, et al. Sub-chronic impact of cannabinoids in street cannabis on cognition, psychotic-like symptoms and psychological well-being. *Psychol Med.* 2012;42(2):391-400.

¹³ Arterberry BJ, Padovano HT, Foster KT, et al. Higher average potency across the United States is associated with progression to first cannabis use disorder symptom. *Drug Alcohol Depend.* 2019;195:186-192.

¹³ DiForti M, Quattrone D, Freeman TP, et al. The contribution of cannabis use to variation in the incidence of psychotic disorder across Europe (EU-GEI): a multicenter case-control study. *Lancet Psychiatry.* 2019;6(5):427-436.

¹³ Hines LA, Freeman TP, Gage SH, et al. Association of high-potency cannabis use with mental health and substance use in adolescence. *JAMA Psychiatry.* 2020;77(10):1044-1051.

Further, the percentage of reports of cannabis usage and incidents of cannabis use disorder (CUD) is much higher among adolescents.

- A long, school-based study found that cannabis use was associated with poorer functioning in high school students across more domains – academic performance, unpreparedness, delinquency, and mental health – compared to alcohol use.¹⁴

Mental Health Issues with PA Youth

Good mental health enables children to grow emotionally, mentally, socially, and physically. Depression, anxiety, and stress are known as negative emotions and are associated with quality of life. And, negative emotions are risk factors for adolescents.¹⁵

A number of scientific studies have identified a link between mental health problems, such as depression, and the use of alcohol, tobacco, & other drugs during adolescence. According to the 2019 PA youth survey, these four depressive symptoms were indicated by students in grades 6, 8, 10, & 12.¹⁶

- 38.0% of students reported, “sad or depressed most days in the past year”
- 25.0% of students reported, “sometimes life is just not worth it”
- 36.3% of students reported, “at times, I feel I am no good at all”
- 23.4% of students reported, “I am inclined to think I’m a failure”

There is a relationship between marijuana use and these students reporting depressive symptoms:¹⁶
Of the students reporting NO depressive symptoms:

- 4.7% report past 30-day marijuana use, and;
- 9.1% report lifetime marijuana use

Of the students reporting MODERATE depressive symptoms:

- 10.8% report past 30-day marijuana use, and;
- 19.5% report lifetime marijuana use

Of the students reporting HIGH depressive symptoms:

- 22.4% report past 30-day marijuana use, and;
- 36.0% report lifetime marijuana use

¹⁴ D’Amico et al, NIH, 2016 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5016216/>

¹⁵ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1697260020300119>

¹⁶ <https://www.pccd.pa.gov/JuvenileJustice/Documents/2019%20PAYS/State%20of%20Pennsylvania%20Profile%20Report.Final.pdf>

Following legalization, marijuana would inevitably become more readily available, accessible to the entire population and specifically to vulnerable populations like those with predisposed addictive disorders, youth, pregnant women, and low-socio economic communities.

It's important that we acknowledge Black people and Communities of Color who were and continue to be adversely affected by marijuana policies. States that have legalized have not been able to address this social justice issue which may indicate that it's systemic and not one that legalization can prevent. Per the American Civil Liberties Union, Black people are still more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than White people in every state, including those that have legalized marijuana.¹⁷

In Illinois, past-month frequent THC use (> 20 days per month) tripled amongst African Americans, now up to 11%. This was consistent in Michigan, but not in neighboring non-commercialized states.¹⁸

Before considering legalization, it's our hope that an honest conversation around this issue will occur and that the voices of prevention, medical, and treatment communities would be represented and invited to the table.

Once again, thank you Representative Frankel, Representative Rapp, and the members of the Health Committee and Subcommittee for this opportunity to testify

Sincerely,
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¹⁷ <https://www.aclu.org/report/tale-two-countries-racially-targeted-arrests-era-marijuana-reform>

¹⁸ <https://cannabis.illinois.gov/media/reports-and-public-presentations.html>