



Impact of Legalized Marijuana in New Mexico

New Mexico is a great state for many reasons, but financial management and business-friendly policies are not among them. Unfortunately, New Mexico has floundered for decades and as we struggle to find answers to improve our state, New Mexico Business Coalition (NMBC) encourages elected officials to seek successful policies from other states while avoiding laws and policy that have been found harmful.

Some elected officials are looking to other states that have legalized marijuana as an example of 'successful' policy. They are focused on new tax revenue as well as more freedom for marijuana users, but the ill effects of this decision would far outweigh their desired results.

There are many sources of information to show the detrimental impacts of legalized marijuana. Data has been collected for this informational paper from several sources including, but not limited to: the National Highway Safety Administration, University of Washington News, Colorado Department of Transportation, Britannica ProCon.org, the Highway Loss Data Institute, and the Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (RMHIDTA) that worked in concert with more than 30 organizations to evaluate the effects marijuana legalization has had on Colorado residents since 2013.

Societal costs of marijuana use include paying for increased emergency room visits, medical care and addiction treatment, drugged driving accidents, increased crime and negative impacts on health.

Since recreational marijuana was legalized in Colorado in 2013, traffic deaths where drivers tested positive for [marijuana increased 135% while all Colorado traffic deaths increased 24%](#). The [Highway Loss Data Institute](#) found an increased crash risk in states where marijuana was legalized with a 6% collision claim increase in Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and Colorado.

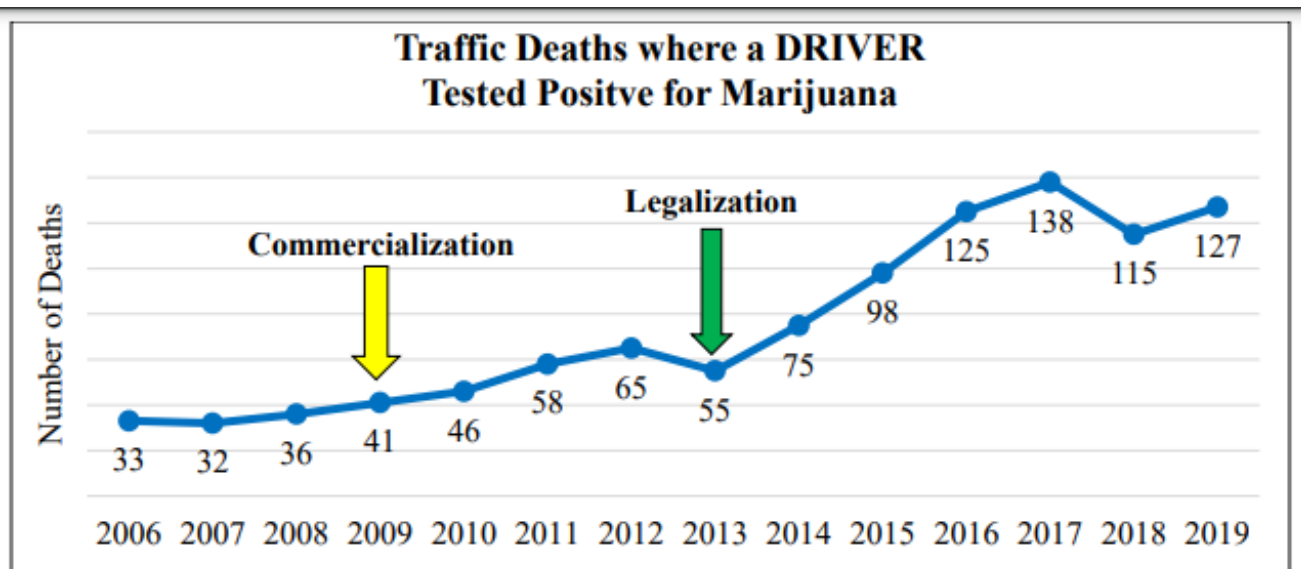
Emergency room visits related to marijuana grew by [30% while related hospitalizations increased 200%](#). General health impacts created or exasperated by marijuana use include asthma, bronchitis, upper respiratory tract infections and psychiatric needs. Poison-control marijuana exposure cases for children 9 years old and younger increased over five times in Colorado after legalization.

Money raised from legal marijuana taxes generally accounts for [less than 1%](#) of a state's tax revenue so while some of that revenue may be earmarked for increased crime protection, mental health facilities and drug treatment, there is usually not sufficient revenue to take care of the problems while providing the boon to the economy that proponents say will occur.

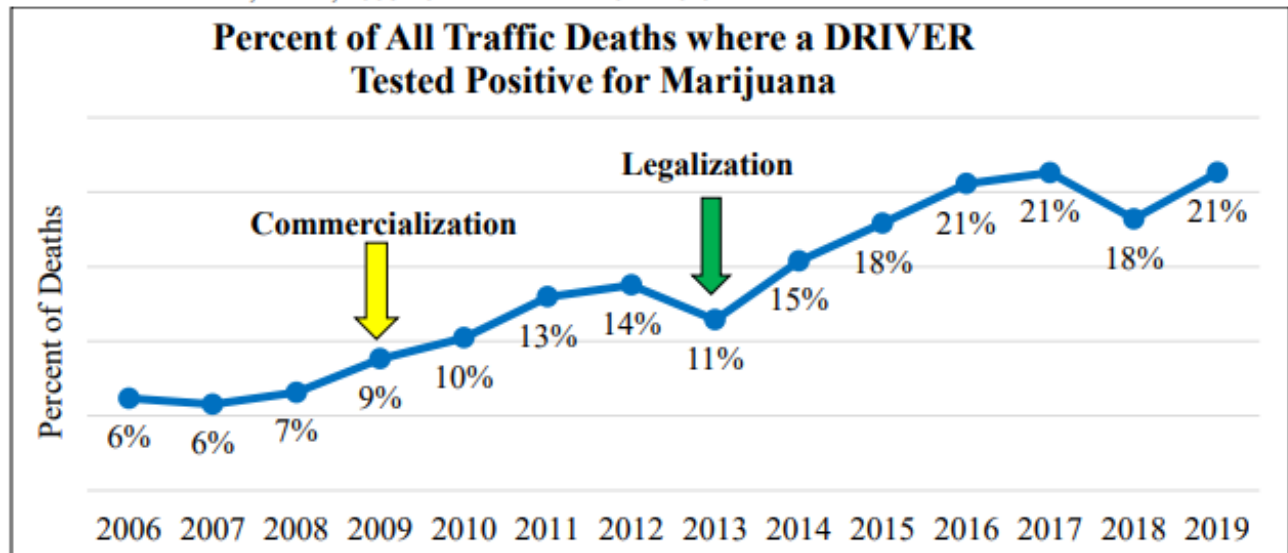
It has been shown in states that have legalized recreational marijuana that teen use increases significantly. In Colorado, [teen marijuana use jumped 20%](#) in the two-year average after marijuana was legalized for adults. Marijuana use is especially dangerous for our youth because human brains are not fully developed until about age 25.

Issues related to marijuana legalization:

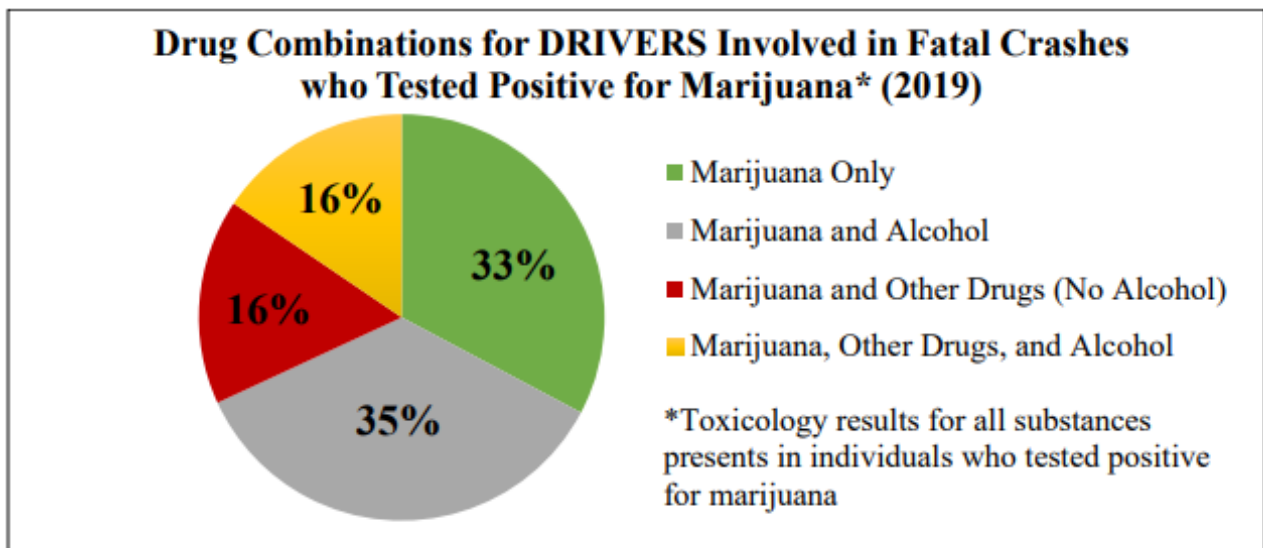
Traffic Fatalities & Impaired Driving: On the next page is a graphic representation on the most recent marijuana related accident data, published in 2020, from the National Highway and Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT):



SOURCE: NHTSA, FARS, 2006-2011 and CDOT 2012-2019



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Marijuana Use by Children: A July 2020 report by the [University of Washington](#) followed children since legalization of marijuana occurred in that state and found that teen usage has increased. “The longitudinal study of more than 230 teens and young adults finds that teens may be more likely to use marijuana following legalization — with the proliferation of stores and increasing adult use of the drug — than they otherwise would have been.”

According to the [Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area](#) Children 12 years old and older who say they’ve used marijuana in the past month increased 30%, and their usage is 76% higher than the national average. Adult marijuana usage increased 19% and is 73% higher than the national average. Marijuana use is especially dangerous for our youth because human brains are not fully developed until about age 25.

Public Health: The yearly number of emergency department visits [related to marijuana increased 30% and marijuana-related hospitalizations increased 200%](#). The percent of suicide incidents in which toxicology results were positive for marijuana increased 9%. “The [emergency department has seen increased visits](#) for primary care needs, breathing problems related to inhalation of marijuana, including asthma, bronchitis, upper respiratory tract infections, as well as psychiatric needs, accidental or intentional overdoses and, unfortunately, increased pediatric patients with issues related to marijuana,” said Dr. Karen Randal, an emergency room physician in Colorado.

Black Market: While proponents for legalization say it will decrease criminal activity, law enforcement shows the opposite is true. From legalization through 2019, the [Colorado Drug Task Forces](#) conducted 278 investigations of black market marijuana in Colorado resulting in: 237 felony arrests and 7.49 tons of marijuana and 68,600 plants were seized. Seizures of Colorado marijuana in the U.S. mail system going to 29 other states have increased 17%.

Legal marijuana has [increased opportunities for the black market](#) because criminals have found it is easy for cartels to undercut state-licensed sellers. The Colorado Attorney General's office said that legalization "has inadvertently helped fuel the business of Mexican drug cartels ..." Law officials stated that the cartels actually grew marijuana under the guise of a legal operation in Colorado, using that to fuel the black market in other states.

Societal Impact: Some legislators point to an unfair criminal system as a reason to legalize recreational marijuana. But they need not worry. 'Catch and release' criminal justice 'reforms' have resolved the overcrowding issues for the incarcerated because criminals are fast tracked out of incarceration and back on the streets to reoffend. And New Mexicans watch our crime rate continue to skyrocket.

In addition, medical marijuana has been legal since 2007 and New Mexico decriminalized the possession of small amounts of marijuana in 2019.

Employment: New Mexico employers are already challenged to find drug-free workers for jobs that require a strict 'no use' policy for safety reasons. According to [Britannica ProCon.org](#), workplace incidents involving employees under the influence of marijuana increased from 6% to 20% the year after legalization in Colorado. Employees who screened positive for marijuana use had 55% more industrial accidents, 85% more injuries, and absenteeism rates 75% higher than those who tested negative, [according to a study](#) done on postal workers.

Homelessness: [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\)'s data](#) shows New Mexico had the nation's largest percentage increase in homelessness from 2018 to 2019 at 27%. HUD's report also shows homeless rates increased significantly after legalization of recreational marijuana in the state of Washington (18.9%) and Colorado (9.1%). Consider how legalized recreational marijuana would impact homelessness in New Mexico.

NMBC understands the need to diversify our economy and provide additional revenue streams, but New Mexico is currently in the forefront nationwide of myriad problems: high homeless population, mental illness challenges that have not been adequately addressed, high addiction rates, poor performance of some students, and a challenging hiring environment.

Reports show that marijuana tax revenue is unlikely to address the societal problems that legalization will create. Revenue from marijuana taxes generally account for [less than 1% of a state's tax revenue](#). So legislators should focus on the societal costs of legalized marijuana in other states and not pursue a pipe dream of success that could easily just be a smoke screen for additional failure.

The New Mexico Business Coalition (NMBC) focuses on improving the business environment for companies and the quality of life for all New Mexicans. Its nonpartisan educational efforts focus on providing New Mexicans the facts about issues impacting business opportunities and job creation in our state. nmbizcoalition.org