

Position on the Legalization of “Recreational” Marijuana January, 2018

Drug and alcohol misuse—especially among young people—is a major public health problem. Teenage marijuana use is strongly correlated with declines in academic performance, motivation, memory and cognition; and the long-term effects of today’s marijuana—genetically modified and bred for high concentrations of THC—are largely unknown.

As the country debates new policies on marijuana—medicalization, decriminalization and legalization—NCADA keeps the health and well-being of young people as its preeminent concern. Consequently, NCADA is opposed to marijuana reforms that would likely increase use among teenagers.

During the last decade, as more and more states have liberalized their laws, the number of people who report *trying* marijuana has barely increased. However the number of *heavy* (daily or near-daily) users has soared.

NCADA recognizes that the status quo is changing and we recognize that, in some respects, it *needs* to change. We do not believe that any drug use should be treated as primarily a law enforcement issue, but rather a public health issue. Because the consequences of arrest and a criminal record are generally far more serious than the consequences of marijuana use itself, there needs to be reform.

NCADA is therefore less concerned about the legalization of marijuana than with its **commercialization**. In other words, creating a market-driven marijuana industry in which sellers profit most from those who use the most marijuana is a model fraught with unintended negative consequences.

This country has paid a high price—in social, economic, and health-care costs—from the commercialization of its other two addictive drugs: alcohol and tobacco. Commercializing a third addictive drug is likely to create a different and nontrivial set of problems.

Like alcohol, marijuana is “no ordinary commodity,” and for that reason, NCADA believes that lifting prohibition should be accompanied by protections for the minority of consumers who will become addicted.

Therefore, NCADA believes that the legal status of the cannabis plant should not create opportunities for corporate profit and increased state tax revenue. Though forgoing tax revenue is politically unpopular, we believe that selling and taxing marijuana the way we’re done with alcohol and tobacco is likely to normalize its use, increase its availability, and lead to increased negative health outcomes, especially among young users.

NCADA urges caution, and reminds everyone that there need not be a binary choice between full prohibition and full commercialization. Other countries and other U.S. jurisdictions have implemented not-for-profit cooperatives; “grow and share” programs, and other initiatives that eliminate criminal penalties while not generating a significant profit/revenue motive.

We will closely monitor legalization as it continues to unfold in eight states and the District of Columbia, and evaluate the impact on the health of our kids. We will push for more, and more effective prevention programs. We will equip parents with the information they need on the very real health risks of early use and help them have factual, frank conversations with their kids in this changing landscape.