The Impact of Marijuana Legalization: A Prevention Perspective

Claire Schleder, MPH
DBH Prevention & Early Intervention
What does this mean for prevention?
Youth marijuana use is happening

- 39% of Alaskan youth have ever used marijuana
- 20% of Alaskan youth currently use marijuana
- Among youth, associated problems include:
  - School failure, dropout, truancy
  - Poorer memory, attention, IQ
  - Other risk behavior
  - Justice system involvement
  - Mental health problems
  - Abuse and dependence
- Use before age 18 increases these risks
The premise of prevention science

To prevent a problem before it happens, the factors that predict the problem must be changed.
Predictors are organized into two groups

Risk Factors

Protective Factors
The first step of prevention

To identify and understand the risk and protective factors that predict the problem
Risk factors for youth marijuana use

**Community**
- Availability of drugs
- Community laws and norms favorable toward drug use and crime
- Media portrayals
- Transitions and mobility
- Extreme economic deprivation
- Low neighborhood attachment and community disorganization

**Family**
- Family history of the behavior
- Family management problems
- Family conflict
- Favorable parental attitudes and involvement in the behavior

**School**
- Academic failure beginning in late elementary school
- Lack of commitment to school

**Individual/Peer**
- Friends who engage in the behavior
- Favorable attitudes toward the behavior
- Early initiation of the behavior
Protective factors for youth marijuana use

- Community
  - Prosocial opportunities
  - Reinforcement for prosocial involvement
  - Bonding (connectedness, attachment)
  - Clear and healthy standards for behavior

- Family

- School

- Individual/Peer
  - High intelligence
  - Resilient temperament
  - Competencies and skills
Risk and protective factors for youth marijuana use

UW Social Development Research Group
Parents are essential to prevention

- Parents are an important influence on their children’s drug use through high school
- Parents can influence their children through their:
  - Knowledge of the legal age limit
  - Norms about marijuana use
  - Parenting practices
Do parents know the legal age for marijuana use?

What is the legal age limit for marijuana use?

![Bar chart showing the percentage of responses for different age limits.]

Nonrepresentative sample of parents of Tacoma 10th graders

N=115
Source: Mason et al., 2013
Perceived harm is related to teen use

U.S. Twelfth Graders Reporting Perceived “Great Risk of Harm” and Marijuana Use in Past Month, 1975-2012

Source: Adapted by CESAR from University of Michigan, Monitoring the Future
Marijuana legalization may affect the levels of risk and protective factors for youth

- Two factors will change
  - **Availability**
  - **Norms**

- Other factors may change:
  - Family management
  - Marijuana-specific parenting practices
  - Peer and sibling use
  - Parent use
  - Youth alcohol and cigarette use
Implications

- Limit availability to youth
  - Edibles that appeal to youth
- Influence youth norms about use
- Influence adult norms
  - Parental norms
  - Providing marijuana to youth and youth use
- Address other risk and protective factors
  - Timing and settings for interventions
THANK YOU!

Claire Schleder
claire.schleder@alaska.gov
907.269.3425