

10 Things that Will or Won't Happen When Cannabis is Legalized in Your State

Currently 37 states across the country have legalized cannabis for medical purposes; with 21 of those states and the District of Columbia also legalizing adult-use (also known as “recreational”) cannabis. Since 1996, when California legalized medical cannabis (the first successful cannabis legalization effort in the United States) researchers, legislators and advocates have studied the various impacts legalization has had at a state or regional level. This research often serves as a credible, verifiable crystal ball for the nearly 20 remaining states that still ban cannabis and are considering legalization. The research also provides a credible glimpse of cannabis’s positive impact nationwide when federal prohibition of cannabis is eventually lifted.

Here are ten examples of legal cannabis’ broad and positive societal impacts:

1. Property values increase.

A [2019 report](#) from Clever, a real estate marketing firm, found an average increase in value of \$22,888 for homes located in cities that allow dispensaries, compared to cities where they are prohibited. Additionally, the National Association of Realtors [reported in 2020](#) that medical and adult-use states experienced an increase in demand for land, warehouses and storefronts for commercial cannabis use.

2. Crime doesn’t go up.

According to a [2019 study](#) published in “Justice Quarterly,” Washington and Colorado—the first two states to legalize adult-use cannabis--saw “minimal to no effect” on major crimes after legalization. There were also no long-term effects on violent and property crime rates. A separate, [unrelated study](#), examining crime data from 1990 through 2006 found no increase in crime in states with medical cannabis laws. The researchers also found a potential correlation between medical legalization and a reduction in violent crime.

3. Good paying jobs are created.

[New Frontier Data](#) reported in 2019 that there were an estimated 340,000 legal-market cannabis jobs, and that number is expected to grow to 743,000 by 2025. According to a [report from Glassdoor](#), the median salary for cannabis industry job openings is 10.7% higher than the average U.S. median salary.

4. Additional/new tax revenue is generated.*

State and local governments stand to generate considerable tax revenue when they legalize cannabis and implement sensible tax policies. Both California and Colorado recently surpassed the \$1 billion mark for tax revenue generated since legalizing adult-use cannabis. States have used cannabis tax revenue to fund, among other things, schools, medical research, substance abuse programs, veterans assistance programs, and a variety of much needed public health and safety initiatives.

5. Youth usage won’t increase (it may actually decrease).*

A [2019 study](#) examining data from the 1993 to 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveys found no relationship between medical cannabis laws and youth cannabis usage. The same study also found that adult-use legalization may be associated with a *decrease* in youth usage rates. A 2018 [Colorado Department of Public Safety report](#) found no significant difference in past 30-day cannabis use between 2013 and 2017, indicating that even as adult-use cannabis markets mature and expand, youth consumption rates do not increase.

6. Traffic fatalities won't increase.*

A [2017 Columbia University study](#) (considered one of the most comprehensive studies on cannabis-impaired driving to date) found that states with medical cannabis laws had *lower* traffic fatality rates compared to states without. A [2018 University of Oregon study](#) concluded that there is little evidence to demonstrate that cannabis-related traffic fatalities in Washington and Colorado increased significantly as a result of adult-use cannabis legalization.

7. It isn't a "gateway" to hard drugs.*

In 1999 the [Institute of Medicine](#) found that cannabis use does not appear to cause, or be the most significant predictor of, serious drug abuse. Similarly, [RAND's Drug Policy Research Center](#) suggests "it is not marijuana use, but individuals' opportunities and unique propensities to use drugs that determine their risk of initiating hard drugs."

8. Opioid use and opioid-related deaths decrease.*

A [2020 study](#) from the Columbia University Irving Medical Center found that states with medical cannabis programs experienced a nearly 20% drop in certain opioid prescriptions, compared to states that prohibit cannabis. An earlier [2014 study](#) found that states that allow cannabis as a treatment for chronic pain and other conditions have significantly lower state-level opioid overdose mortality rates than states where cannabis is illegal.

9. More tourists.

Washington and Colorado experienced an increase in tourism and a rise in hotel revenue following their legalization of adult-use cannabis, according to a [2020 study](#) published in the Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy.

10. Healthier citizens.

A [2019 study](#) of adult-use states revealed that 81% of participants who used cannabis while exercising engaged in more minutes of aerobic and anaerobic activity per week. Another [study](#) found that, during the course of a 4-month trial, cannabis consumers over age 60 engaged in more physical activity and were in better shape than non-consumers.

A note about criminal record expungement: A significant component of legalization is ending the failed "war on drugs," which includes lessening police interactions and expunging cannabis-related arrest records. But legalization does not automatically lead to expungement. Some states have included expungement provisions as part of the legalization process, while others passed separate expungement legislation after the fact. In all states with both a medical and adult-use market, individuals are able to have their records cleared in some capacity. However, the same is not true for states with just a medical program. For example, [Alabama has harsh penalties](#) for first-time possession, despite a medical cannabis program in place. In states where expungement is available, thousands of people are better able to get a job, secure housing, establish credit and do other things to achieve a better life. Legalization can put an end to the unnecessary criminalization of cannabis that results in the arrest of hundreds of thousands of people every year. To do so, expungement must be explicitly included in the legalization process.

**denotes Weedmaps policy paper available about this subject.*