

Executive Summary

The goal of this health impact report is to determine the potential health and social impacts of marijuana in Rhode Island.

History of RI Legislation Related to Marijuana

In 2006, RI legalized marijuana for “medicinal purposes”. This law has been revised over the years to include additional qualifying conditions and to modify the mechanism whereby patients can obtain marijuana products

In 2013, RI repealed criminal penalties for possession of less than one ounce of marijuana

From 2010-2016, bills were introduced to tax and regulate marijuana for all residents. To date, none of these bills has passed

In 2016, MA voters elected to legalize marijuana

Behaviors and Attitudes Related to Marijuana

From 2013 to 2014, marijuana use increased in all geographic locations across the United States, with the greatest increase in the Northeast region

Adolescent use of marijuana is higher in states with enacted medical marijuana laws

Over the past years, fewer high school students in RI perceive marijuana use as harmful

Increases in marijuana use parallels a declining perceived risk of harm.

Educational Impact of Marijuana Use

Early initiation of marijuana use is associated with lower income and college degree completion, a greater need for economic assistance, unemployment, and use of other drugs, including opioids

Student Assistant Counselors in Rhode Island have witnessed an increase in the number of students under the influence of marijuana while at school in the 2015-2016 school year

College students using marijuana are at risk for negative future academic outcomes

Health Impact of Marijuana

With long-term marijuana use, executive functions can continue to be impaired, memory and attention increasingly worsen, and risk-taking and poorer decision-making can result from functional brain alterations.

Research on the negative physical and mental effects of marijuana is ongoing.

Costs Associated with Prevention of Youth Substance Use

RISAPA currently derives funding only from the federal Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) Block Grant. There are no prevention funds in the state budget.

The RISAPA coalitions use their funding to address underage drinking, illicit drug use, prescription drug misuse, and tobacco prevention.

The proposed RI FY2017 budget includes a call for only 5.0 full-time employees (FTEs) to monitor the medical marijuana program, palling in comparison to Colorado’s 70 FTEs

Where Do We Go from Here? – Data Collection

The current situation suggests that marijuana use in RI will continue to increase. RI lacks a data collection infrastructure to monitor this public health crisis. Efforts should be made to address this gap, especially before any further legislative changes are made which could have adverse effects on RI’s population.