



What Medical Cannabis (Marijuana) Can and Can't Do

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Disclosures

- ▶ I have no past, present, or planned financial connections to the cannabis industry.
- ▶ I have no interest in telling you how to vote.

Benefits and Risks of Medical Cannabis

- ▶ How medications are generally approved and evaluated
- ▶ How medical cannabis has generally been approved and evaluated
- ▶ Public health considerations in understanding “what works”

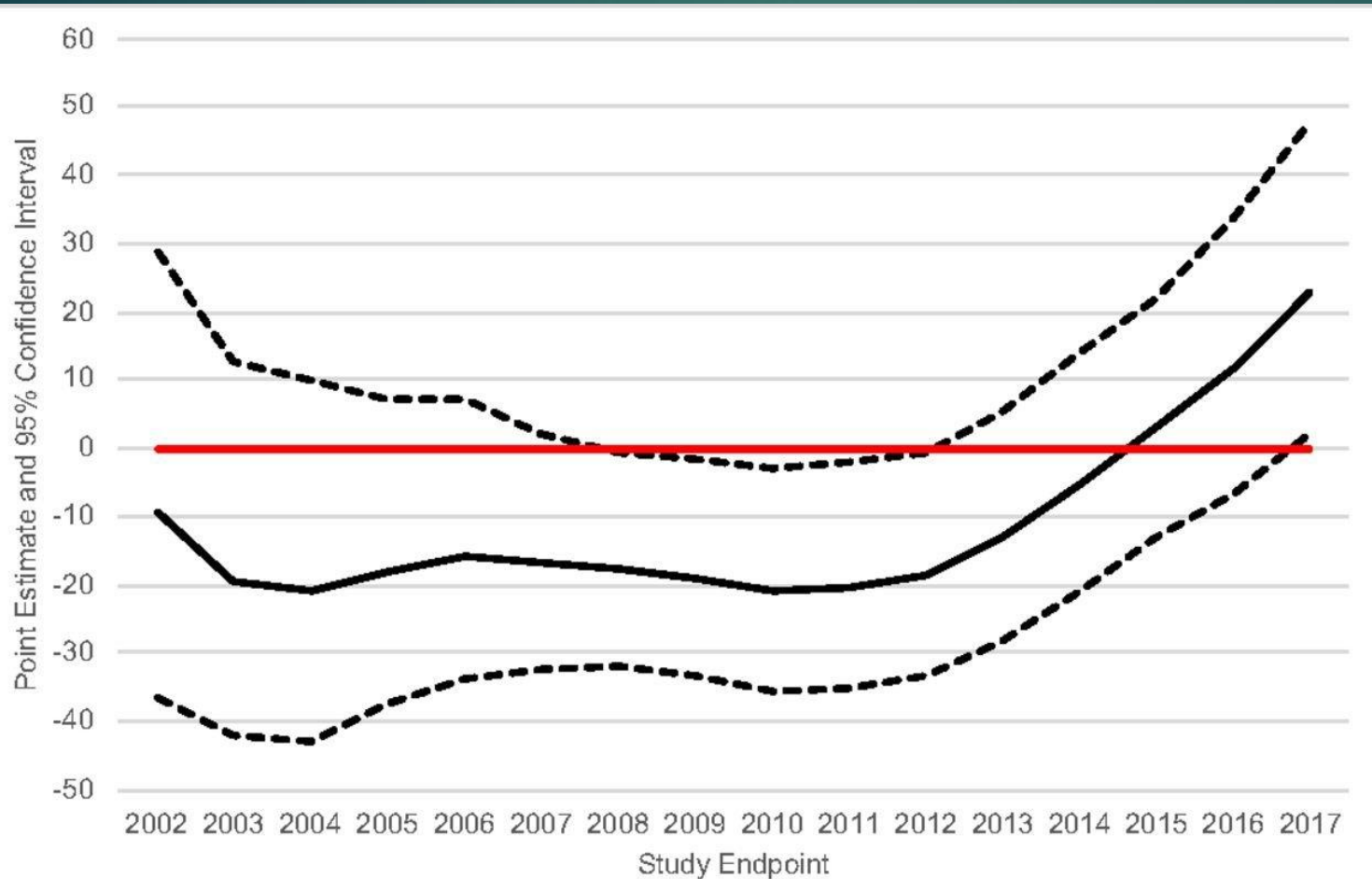
Some Cannabis-Based Medicines

- ▶ Marinol for chemotherapy-induced nausea
- ▶ Epidiolex for seizure disorder
- ▶ Sativex for spasticity in multiple sclerosis

Profit-driven Hype



States with Medical Cannabis Have HIGHER than expected overdoses



Source: Shover, C.L., et al. (2019). Association between medical cannabis laws and opioid overdose mortality has reversed. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *116*, 12624-12626.



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Review

Cannabis use among military veterans: A great deal to gain or lose?



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ABSTRACT

Policy changes have resulted in dramatic increases in access to cannabis for medical purposes. Veterans are disproportionately affected by conditions for which medical cannabis is often pursued, making an evidence-based perspective on risks versus benefits of high priority. The current review sought to examine the state of the evidence on the correlates and consequences of cannabis use among veterans. Using a comprehensive search strategy, 501 articles were identified and 86 studies met criteria for inclusion. The literature was predominated by cross-sectional studies (67%) of male veterans (71.4%–100% male) from the United States (93.0%). Three overarching themes emerged, comprising cannabis associations with other substance use, mental health, and physical health outcomes. The balance of the evidence associated cannabis use with negative health outcomes, with consistent positive associations with other substance use, psychiatric disorders, and self-harm/suicidality. Few studies examined the therapeutic effects of cannabis, thus limiting the potential to evaluate evidence of efficacy. Priority areas for future research are studies using designs that can examine the directionality of links between cannabis and health in veterans more conclusively, and studies directly examining therapeutic efficacy of cannabis-based therapies in veterans. Methodologically rigorous design will be essential to inform clinical recommendations and practices guidelines in an era of burgeoning access to cannabis.

Other unvalidated and potentially dangerous therapeutic claims

- ▶ COVID-19
- ▶ Heroin Addiction
- ▶ Diabetes
- ▶ Cancer
- ▶ Pre-Natal health



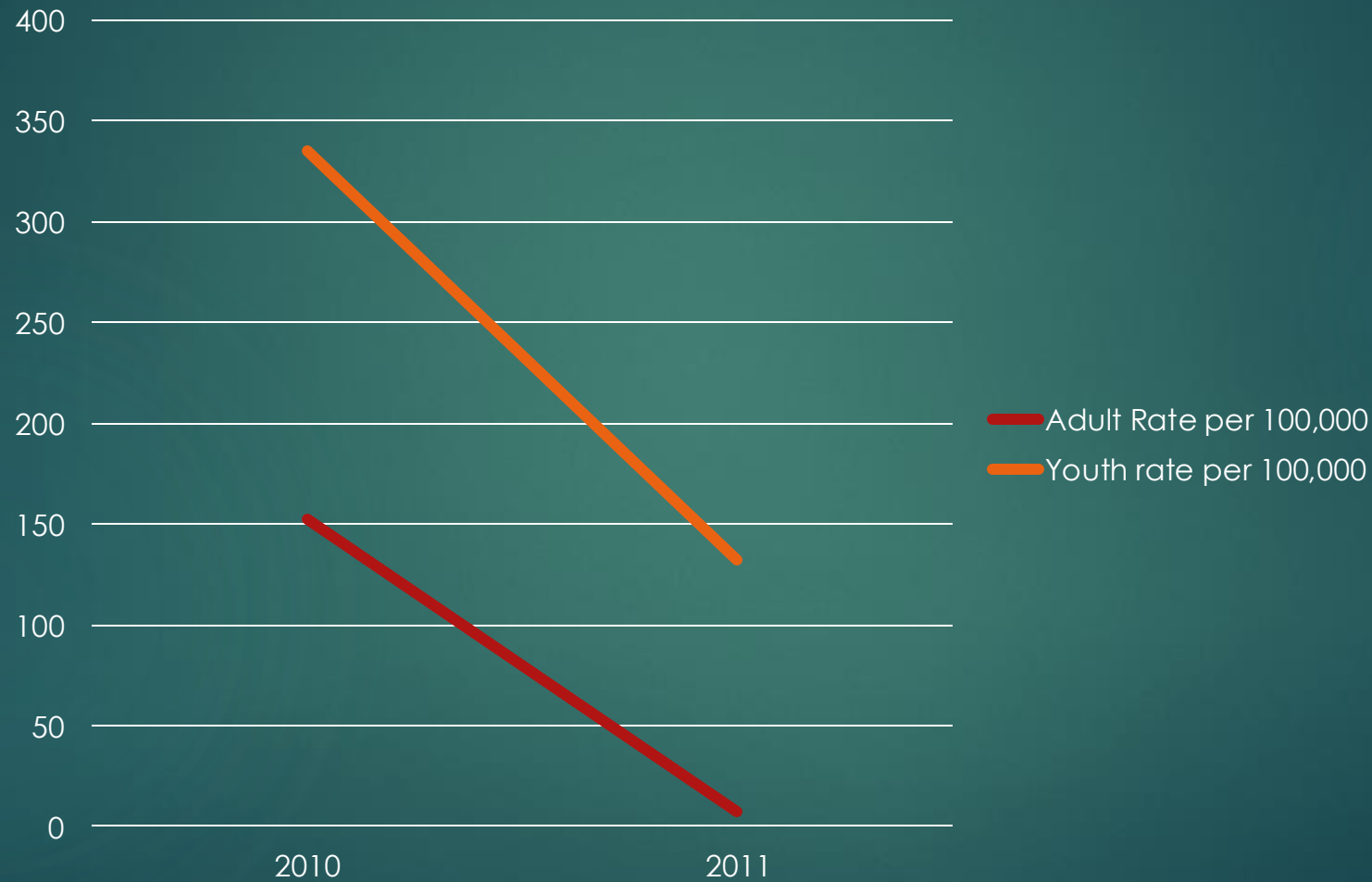
Key Point: The Status and Trust of
Medicine Have to be **Earned**

Using Medical Cannabis as Backdoor Recreational Legalization

- ▶ Some activists argue that legalization promotes social justice, therefore this deception is justified.
- ▶ But giving sick people confidence in unproven cures is socially unjust
- ▶ This form of legalization also likely *increases* racial and economic disparities in arrests

If your goal is fewer arrests, there is a simpler way...

Marijuana Possession Arrests in California Collapsed Immediately Following 2010 Decriminalization



Source: Males, M. (2012). Reform cuts marijuana possession arrests 86% in 2011, upends California drug policing. Center on Criminal and Juvenile Justice.

If Your Goal is Equity in an Industry

- ▶ State retail monopolies have better records of hiring diverse employees than do private companies
- ▶ Retail monopolies in alcohol (e.g., “ABC stores”) reduce consumption-related problems
- ▶ State-owned retailers also have no incentive to engage in profit-driven hype

Summary of State of Evidence

- ▶ Some cannabis-based medicines have been shown effective and more probably will be, but many therapeutic claims are poorly evidenced hype
- ▶ There is potential for harm in communicating to sick people that cannabis has been carefully evaluated like other “medical” drugs
- ▶ As a backdoor recreational legalization strategy, medical cannabis has multiple adverse effects
- ▶ There are other policies available that can lower arrests and promote health and equity if that is the goal.

Thank you for your attention