

# DISPELLING PROHIBITIONIST

# MYTHS

*The following arguments are often put forth by prohibitionists such as Kevin Sabet, but a careful examination of the evidence shows that they are myths that only cloud the public discourse on cannabis policy.*

## MYTH 1 Social Costs of Cannabis Use Outweigh Potential Tax Revenues

Prohibitionists often cite statistics claiming that Americans spend over \$200 billion in costs related to cigarette smoking and only collect \$25 billion in cigarette taxes and argue that cannabis will be the same. There are many problems with this idea, but let's look at just two.

First, tobacco is objectively more harmful than cannabis. A 2010 study in the medical journal *The Lancet* found that cannabis was less dangerous than tobacco to users and had far fewer costs to the rest of society. Second, whatever the social costs of cannabis use are, we are already paying them. Why shouldn't we tax cannabis to discourage abuse and pay for public goods?

## MYTH 2 Legalization Will Lead to Increased Health and Safety Costs

The idea that we cannot ameliorate the harms associated with a substance if it is legal ignores our dramatic success in reducing cigarette smoking rates and drunk driving deaths over the last four decades through a combination of taxes, education, and regulation. Our educational efforts on cigarettes have been so successful (and cannabis prohibition so unsuccessful) that more high school seniors now use cannabis than smoke cigarettes, which are perfectly legal for many seniors.

Furthermore, research indicates that cannabis will often be used as a substitute for alcohol. In a 2013 article in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, economists Mark Anderson and Daniel Rees predicted that legalization in Colorado and Washington will lead to decreased harms from alcohol abuse. "On net," they write, "we predict the public-health benefits of legalization to be positive."

## MYTH 3 Cannabis Use Leads to Dependence

No one denies that cannabis poses risks and that some users become dependent upon it. However, it is important to consider those risks in context. Less than 10 percent of those who use cannabis experience dependence, compared to 32 percent of those who use tobacco and 15 percent of those who use alcohol. Furthermore, most people who use cannabis never go on to try any other illicit substances.

## MYTH 4 Legalization Will Lead to the Creation of "Big Marijuana"

We already have Big Marijuana. They go by names like La Familia and the Sinaloa Cartel. They have killed over 60,000 people in Northern Mexico since 2006, and they derive between 20 and 60 percent of their revenues from the illicit cannabis market. Moreover, recently released documents confirm that the Drug Enforcement Administration allowed the Sinaloa Cartel to operate with impunity since 2000 in exchange for information on its rivals. That is a violation of international law and a corruption of the American justice system.

Prohibition has not eliminated and cannot eliminate the marijuana industry; it has just transformed it into a violent, criminal enterprise. Alcohol Prohibition took the alcohol industry away from Busch and Miller and gave it to Al Capone and Lucky Luciano. Now, cannabis prohibition threatens to turn Mexico into a narco-state.

The cannabis industry will always exist, and it can either be dominated by Mexican cartels who cover the desert with the headless bodies of their rivals, or it can be comprised of honest, regulated, and taxpaying citizens. The choice is ours.



Show-MeCannabis

Show-Me Cannabis is an association of organizations and individuals who believe that prohibition is a failed policy and that legalizing and regulating cannabis in a manner similar to alcohol would better control the production, distribution, and consumption of cannabis than the criminal market does.

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