

Prohibition of cannabis counter-productive

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Prohibition of cannabis in the United States may be counter-productive, with a new study showing that a period of increased law enforcement against the drug coincided with an increase in the number of young adult cannabis users smoking cheaper and more potent produce.

The report, Tools for Debate: US Federal Government Data on [Cannabis Prohibition](#), conducted by researchers from the International Centre for Science in Drug Policy in Vancouver, focused on the effects of national drug prohibition in recent decades, and in an editorial published online this week for the [British Medical Journal](#) (BMJ), Professor Robin Room from the University of Melbourne and Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Center, outlined why this new evidence should be used to reassess approaches to America's management of cannabis use.

“The evidence from the Tools for Debate report is not only that the prohibition system is not achieving its aims, but that more efforts in the same direction only worsen results,” he said.

According to the report, the US federal antidrug budget increased from about \$1.5bn in 1981 to more than \$18bn in 2002. Between 1990 and 2006, cannabis related arrests increased from fewer than 350,000 to more than 800,000 annually and seizures of cannabis from less than 500,000 lb to more than 2.5 million lb. In the same period, the retail price of cannabis decreased by more than half, the potency increased, and the proportion of users who were young adults went up from about 25% to more than 30%. Intensified enforcement of cannabis prohibition thus did not have the intended effects.

Professor Room said the challenge for researchers and policy analysts in light of these findings was to flesh out the details of an effective regulatory system. He suggested that countries who chose to adopt a new approach to cannabis control could allow a regulated legal domestic market while keeping in place international market controls.

“State control instruments - such as licensing regimens, inspectors, and sales outlets run by the government – which are still in place for [alcohol](#) in some areas could be extended to cover cannabis and would provide workable and well-controlled retail outlets for cannabis,” he said.

Provided by University of Melbourne

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