

Pennsylvania's youth more accepting of marijuana, but not using it more, report shows

August 8 2018, by Frank Otto

Table 3. Attitudes of marijuana use among youths (aged 12-17) in Pennsylvania, 2013, 2015, 2017.

	2013 (n=154,054) (%)	2015 (n=165,590) (%)	2017 (n=191,705) (%)
<i>How do you feel about someone your age using marijuana once a month or more?</i>			
Strongly disapprove	60.7	56.9	53.3
Somewhat disapprove	9.8	10.9	11.7
Neither approve or disapprove	16.0	17.9	19.3
Approve	9.3	9.5	10.8

Data source: Pennsylvania Youth Survey

A table from the report that shows strongly disapproving attitudes toward marijuana have dropped between 2013 and 2017. Credit: Drexel University

With Pennsylvania now among the majority of states in legalizing medical marijuana, a new report shows that young people's attitudes toward pot have become more positive in recent years.

But that shift in attitudes doesn't seem to have affected use.

"While what we found shows that attitudes toward marijuana are becoming more accepting, or normalized, use has not increased," said Philip Massey, Ph.D., an assistant professor in Drexel University's

Dornsife School of Public Health, who head up the report. "This is important because many people fear that legalizing marijuana will lead to greater use and potential abuse."

The report, a datasheet put together by the Pennsylvania State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (which Massey chairs) explored access, use and how Pennsylvanians thought about marijuana in the years before and after it was legalized for medical use in 2016.

In Pennsylvanians between 12 and 17 years old, the rate of those who strongly disagreed with marijuana use dropped from 60.7 percent in 2013 to 53.3 percent in 2017. Over the same period, the rate of Pennsylvania youths who thought their parents would feel that it was "very wrong" to smoke marijuana dropped from 81.2 to 75.4 percent.

Additionally, the rate of young people who said they would never try marijuana dropped from 71 percent in 2013 to 62.2 in 2017, with those unsure about whether or not they would want to try it growing from 6.7 to 10.3 percent.

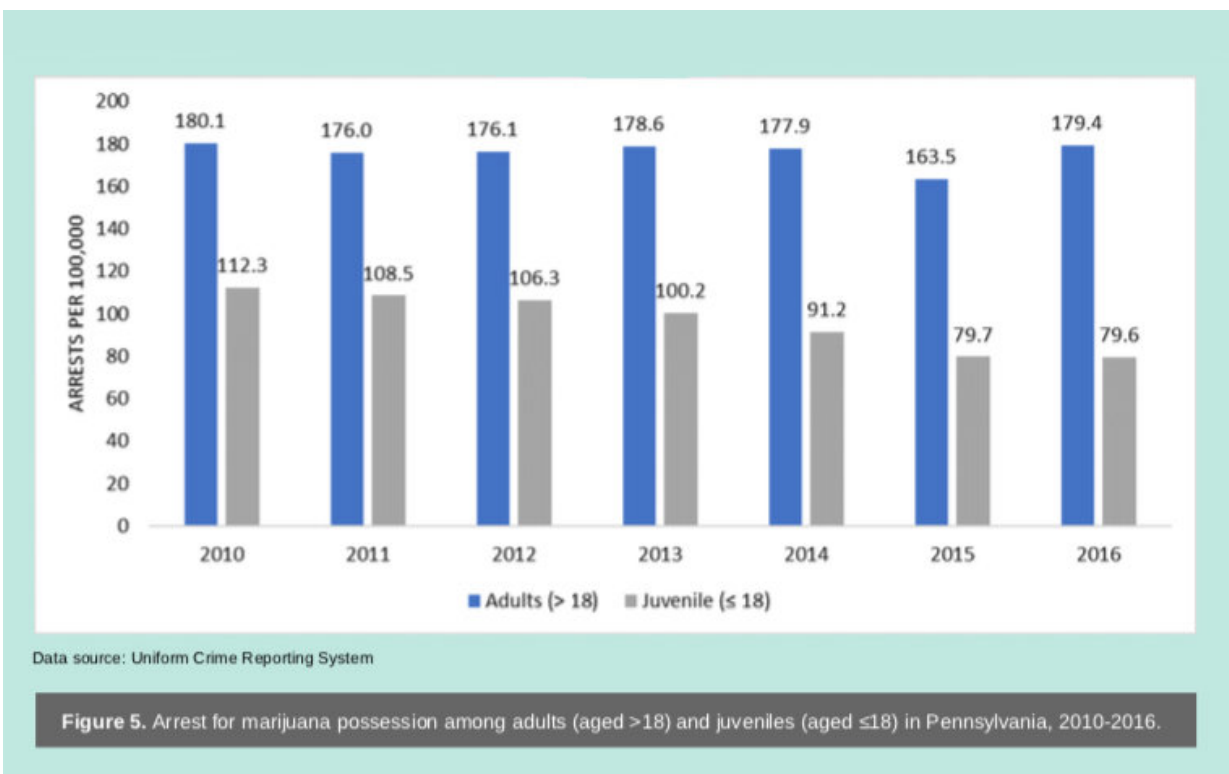
At the same time, the rate of youths who had at least one best friend smoke marijuana over the last year grew by only about one percentage point, from 30.7 to just 31.9. And [young people](#) didn't seem to think the difficulty of getting marijuana changed very much even after it was approved for medical use, with 53.9 percent saying it was "very hard" to acquire in 2013 and 55 percent saying so in 2017.

"Of course, we need to continue to monitor this trend, but these preliminary data tell me that the people who need marijuana for medical purposes are the ones benefitting from this law," Massey said. "It doesn't appear to be affecting youth use."

Overall, this report showing greater potential acceptance for marijuana

could ultimately benefit patients.

"This may result in less stigma towards individuals who benefit from the medicinal properties of marijuana," Massey concluded. "This is important in the [health](#) sector, but could also extend to other sectors, such as the [criminal justice](#) system where certain populations have historically suffered disproportionately higher [arrest](#) rates."



A chart featured in the report that shows adult marijuana-related arrests have remained relatively unchanged, but youth arrests have declined dramatically. Credit: Drexel University

Some Arrest Rates Falling, But Disparities Remain

While the workgroup's datasheet showed that arrest rates related to marijuana in Pennsylvania remained relatively unchanged from 2010 through 2016, juvenile arrest rates fell sharply. In 2010, there were 112.3 marijuana-related arrests per 100,000, but that fell all the way down to 79.6 in 2016.

Massey pointed to the recent downgrade in possible charges for marijuana possession in Pennsylvania's two biggest cities as potential factors in this decline.

"It may be related to the decriminalization of marijuana in Philadelphia—2013—and Pittsburgh—2016," Massey said. "This policy change may have impacted juveniles more than adults."

And as for racial disparities in arrests, the numbers showed a narrowing in recent years.

Black adults were 5.88 times as likely to be arrested than whites when it came to marijuana in 2010, but that fell to 3.72 in 2016. In juveniles, the disparity fell from 2.49 to 1.45 over the same time period.

"What is promising is that the disparity is decreasing," Massey said. "However, we cannot be satisfied with just a decrease but rather should aim for an elimination. That should be the goal."

Although arrest rates don't, at the surface, appear to be related to health, Massey, who studies community health and prevention, pointed out that [public health](#) is fundamentally about reducing disparities that might play a role in people's well-being.

Arrests would fall into such a category.

"The arrest data are an important piece of the puzzle, as there is clear

inequality," Massey said. "The medical [marijuana](#) law that was created for medical and health purposes may have unintended benefits in other sectors like criminal justice."

Provided by Drexel University

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