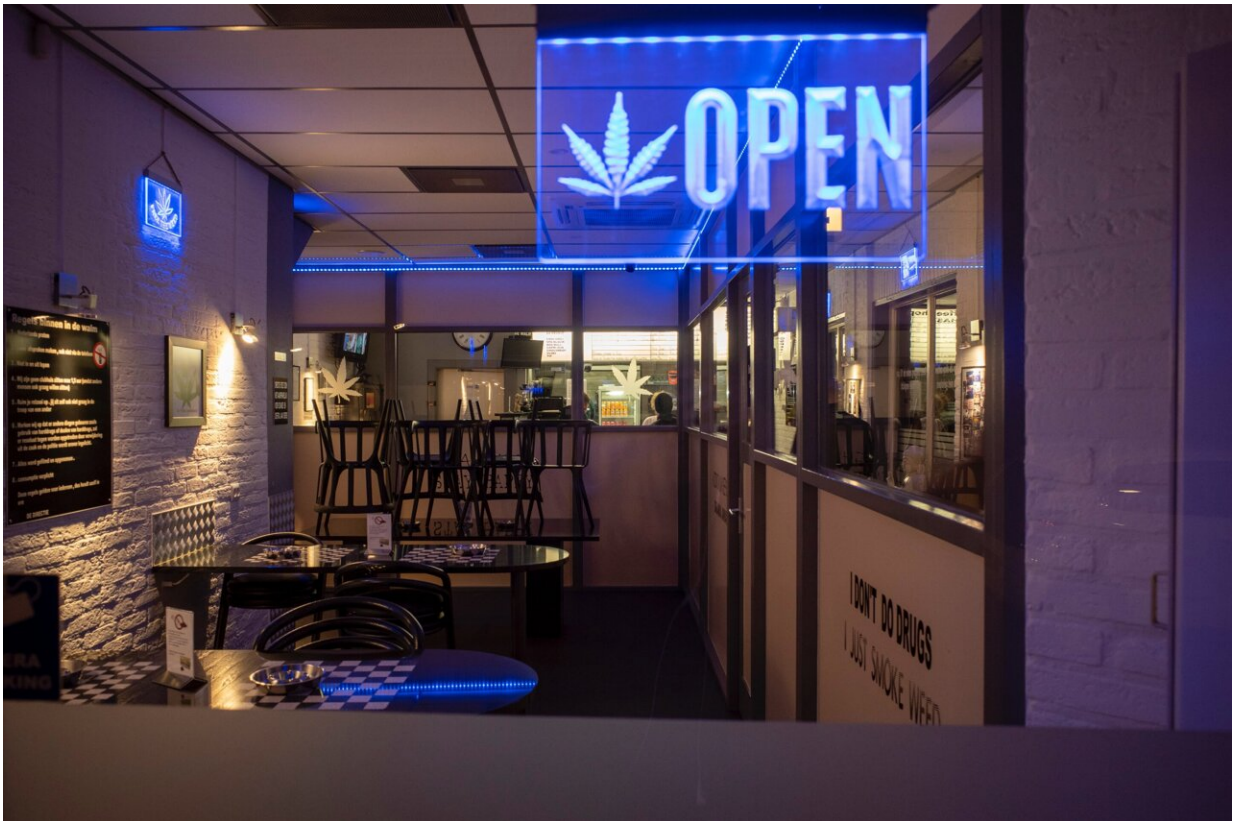


Legalizing marijuana found to decrease use of alcohol, pain meds and cigarettes

May 24 2022, by Bob Yirka



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A team of researchers at the University of Washington, working with a colleague at Multnomah County Health Department and Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division has found that when a state

decriminalizes recreational use of marijuana, the use of alcohol and the abuse of pain medications and smoking cigarettes by young people decreases. In their paper published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, the group describes their study of survey data on young people living in Washington State after the state decriminalized the recreational use of marijuana in 2012.

Over the past decade, many states in the U.S. have allowed the use of marijuana for medical purposes and several have decriminalized its use altogether. Opponents of these measures have claimed that it not only increases the use of marijuana, but increases the use of other drugs such as alcohol and pain medications on the presumption that marijuana is a gateway [drug](#). Prior research has shown that marijuana is not, in fact, a gateway drug, and that its use can provide therapeutic benefits. In this new effort, the researchers have found that rather than serving as a gateway drug, use of marijuana appears to lead to reductions in use of other drugs, at least for young people.

To learn more about the impact of drug use by young people after Washington State legalized the recreational use of marijuana in 2012, the team analyzed data collected from statewide surveys conducted over the years 2014 to 2019. The surveys were given to two groups of [young people](#) (totaling 12,500 respondents overall): those between 18 and 20 and those between 21 and 25. Notably, the legalization of marijuana use in Washington State applies only to those over the age of 21; the drinking age in Washington is also 21.

The researchers found that the use of alcohol by respondents in the prior month was, on average, less after marijuana was legalized, as were heavy drinking episodes. They also found a decrease in the abuse of pain medications and use of nicotine products other than [e-cigarettes](#). Surprisingly, the researchers found use of such devices increased. They suggest that was due to their novelty and the increase in use nationwide,

and unrelated to the legalization of [marijuana](#).

More information: Charles B. Fleming et al, Trends in Alcohol, Cigarette, E-Cigarette, and Nonprescribed Pain Reliever Use Among Young Adults in Washington State After Legalization of Nonmedical Cannabis, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2022.03.006](#)

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Citation: Legalizing marijuana found to decrease use of alcohol, pain meds and cigarettes (2022, May 24) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-05-legalizing-marijuana-decrease-alcohol-pain.html>

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