

Attention

Senator Ian Macdonald
CHAIR,

Senate Inquiry - The Criminal Code and Other Legislation Amendment (Removing Commonwealth Restrictions on Cannabis) Bill 2018

Last Friday, Senator David Leyonhjelm asked a question regarding a Snopes claim that cannabis use by 12-17 year old teens in Colorado had decreased since legalisation. I believe that the Inquiry needs to see the US data relevant to this question because we are concerned that Snopes has selectively fact-checked a narrow slice of data so that it can advance a narrative at odds with the bulk of post-legalisation data.

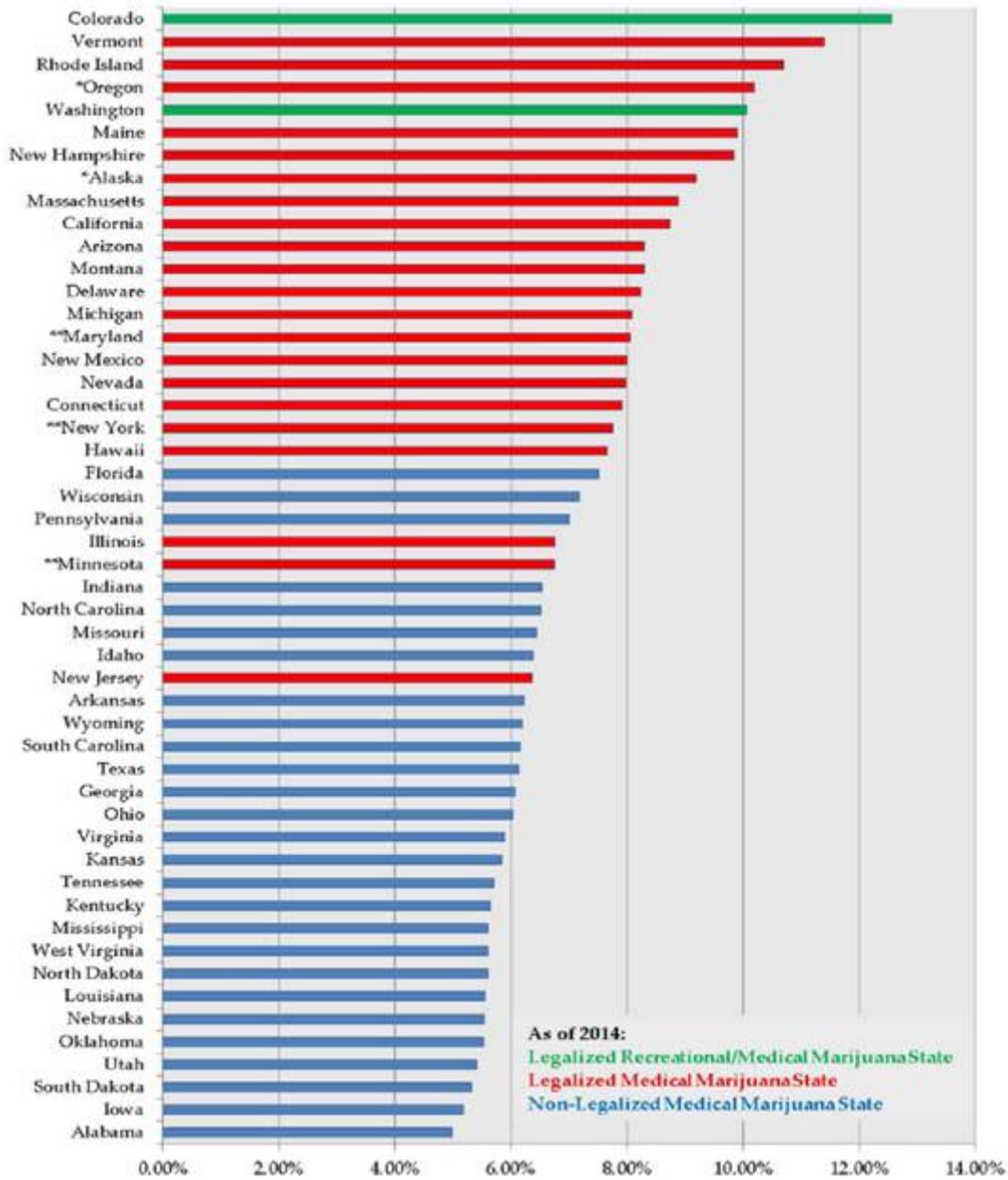
First, it is crucial to recognise that we are using exactly the same SAMHSA NSDUH datasets as Snopes.

In the two years following the 10 December 2012 enactment of cannabis legalisation in Colorado, **there was an increase in cannabis use for ALL age-groups.**

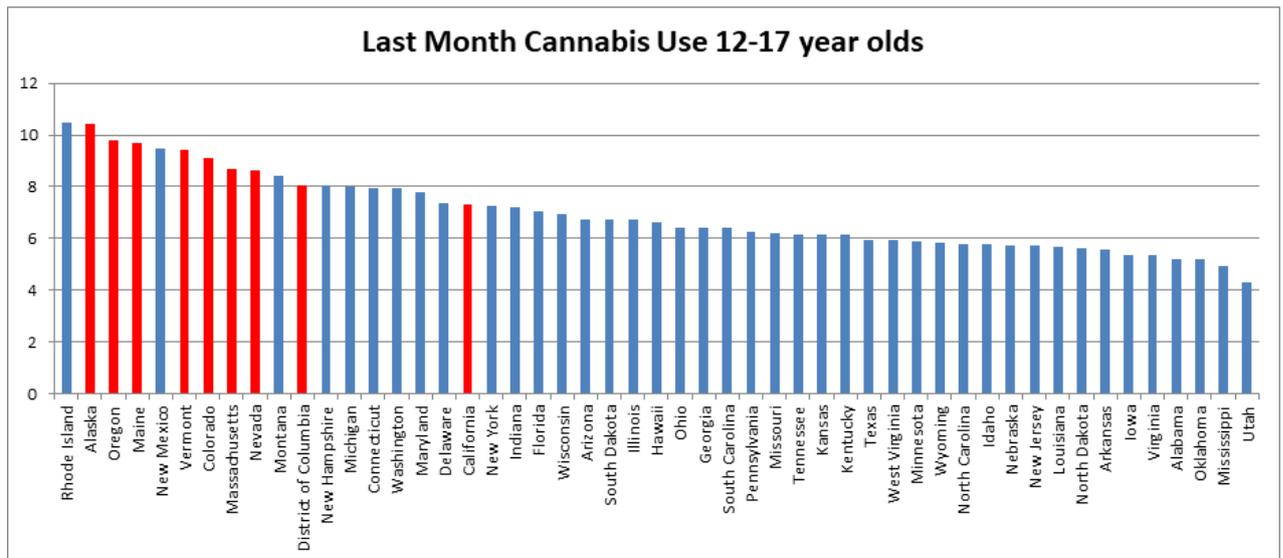
- **12-17 year olds - use rose by 20% (from 10.47% to 12.56%) against decreases of 4% in other states, despite use already being elevated by the legalisation of medical cannabis. For 2013/14, Colorado youth ranked #1 for cannabis use in the United States, up from #4 in 2011/12 and from #14 in 2005/6.**
- **18-25 year olds - against increases of 2% nationally, use of cannabis by those of college age rose by 17% (from 26.81% to 31.24%) within the first two years of legalised cannabis use. In 2013/14 Colorado college-age students ranked #1 for cannabis use in the United States, up from #3 in 2011/12 and from #8 in 2005/6.**
- **26+ year olds - adult use increased by a staggering 63% (from 7.63% - 12.45%) in the first two years after legalisation against increases of 21% nationally. In 2013/14 Colorado adults ranked #1 for cannabis use in the United States, up from #7 in 2011/12 and from #8 in 2005/6.**
- **Calculating for each of the age-groups above from the Census data for 2010 (population 5,029,196) and then calculating from the 2015 estimate of 5,448,055, the number of LAST MONTH cannabis users increased by a staggering 245,000 (almost quarter of a million) from when medical cannabis was commercialized followed by legalisation through to 2015. Note that these figures are for Past Month, not use in the previous 12 months or Lifetime Prevalence figures. This opened 245,000 more people to psychosis, vehicle accidents, depression, suicide, cognitive issues, amotivational syndrome etc etc.**

In summary, the Snopes Fact Check article criticized a Gazette editorial for saying that Colorado had the highest cannabis use in the country following legalisation. The Gazette article was absolutely correct for the years 2013/2014. The graph below shows the results for all States in 2013/14 for those 12-17 years.

Past Month Usage, 12 to 17 Years Old, 2013/2014

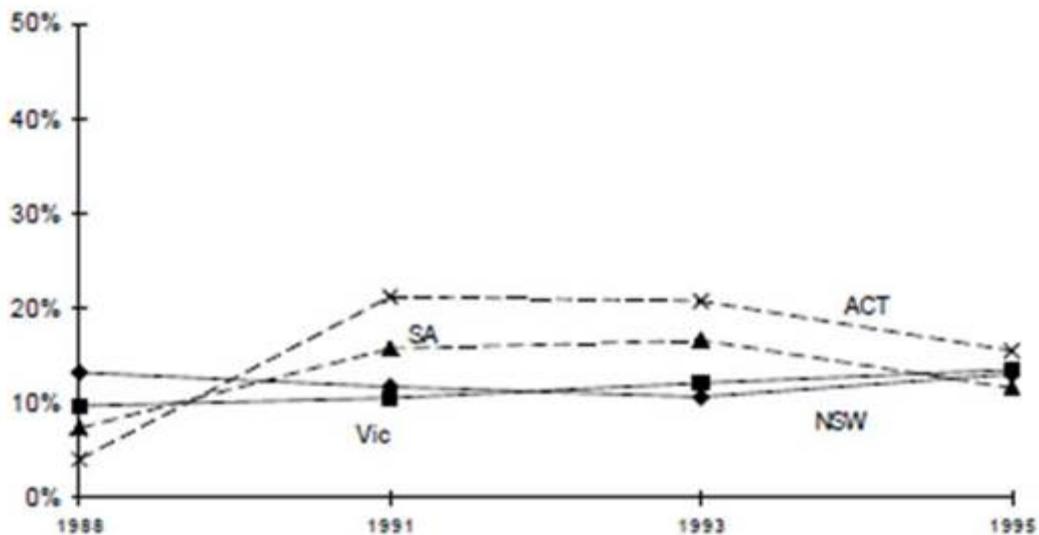


Of course Snopes' cannabis use figures for 2015/2016 are correct, and by 2016 Colorado did indeed rank 7th in the nation. Our concern is that the Snopes article would lead any reader to think that cannabis legalisation does NOT lead to higher rates of cannabis use, and Snopes creates this illusion by concealing the fact that the US states that ranked above Colorado in 2015/2016 did so mostly because they were states that had also legalised cannabis use. Below is the graph for all states with those states that had legalised cannabis by 2016 in red, or where legalisation legislation was already in process.



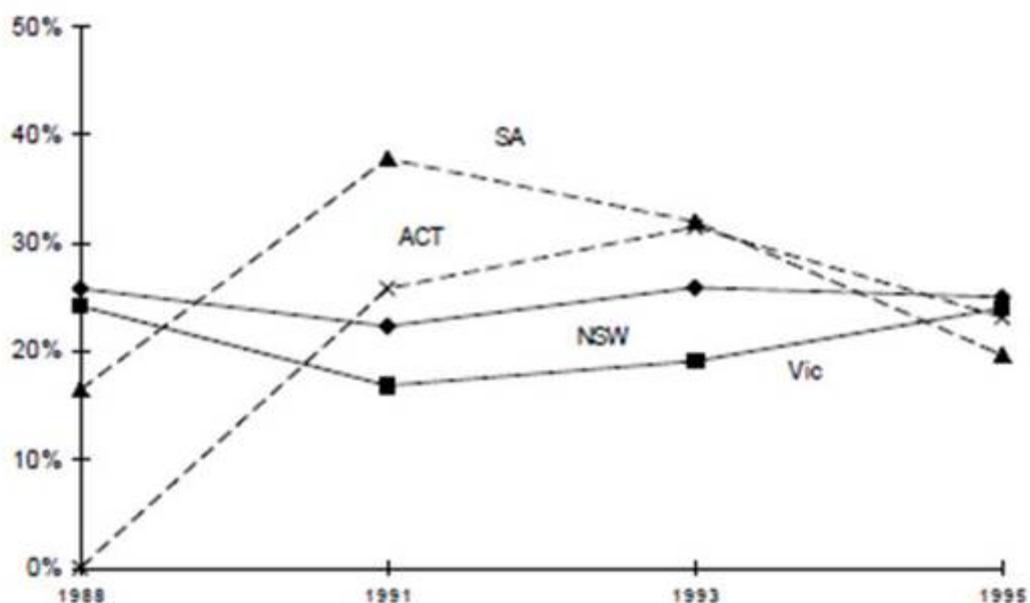
What is clear from this graph is that states that have legalised cannabis mostly annex the top 10-12 places in the US, demonstrating that cannabis legalisation does indeed lead to markedly increased use. To those who might object that some of these states only voted to legalise in November 2016 or began legislative before that time, we would reply that there is very good evidence that the mere CAMPAIGNING to legalise cannabis markedly increases use. As can be seen with the decriminalization of cannabis in the ACT in 1992, as per page 53 of Monograph 31 <https://aic.gov.au/file/5209/download?token=DPxp4ycV> p53, cannabis use rose sharply during the campaigns preceding the changes in legislation in the ACT, which mimicked the sharp increases seen for South Australia which decriminalised in 1987. Note that ACT monthly cannabis use was negligible before 1991, with no established criminal trade as in NSW or Victoria. And yet monthly cannabis use skyrocketed in the year before decriminalisation. We believe the same dynamic is operative in those states where blanket TV advertising by the legalisation lobby, (which in Colorado in 2012 spent \$25 for every \$1 spent by those opposed, as reported by US Drug Czar Gil Kerlikowske) would unquestionably have led young people to see cannabis use as more acceptable. We note that Rhode Island has had bills to legalise cannabis every year since 2011 but the majority of politicians have constantly voted No.

Figure 4.1: Used in the past 12 months for four jurisdictions



Source: NDS 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995

Figure 4.2: Use marijuana monthly or more often for four jurisdictions, 1988-1996

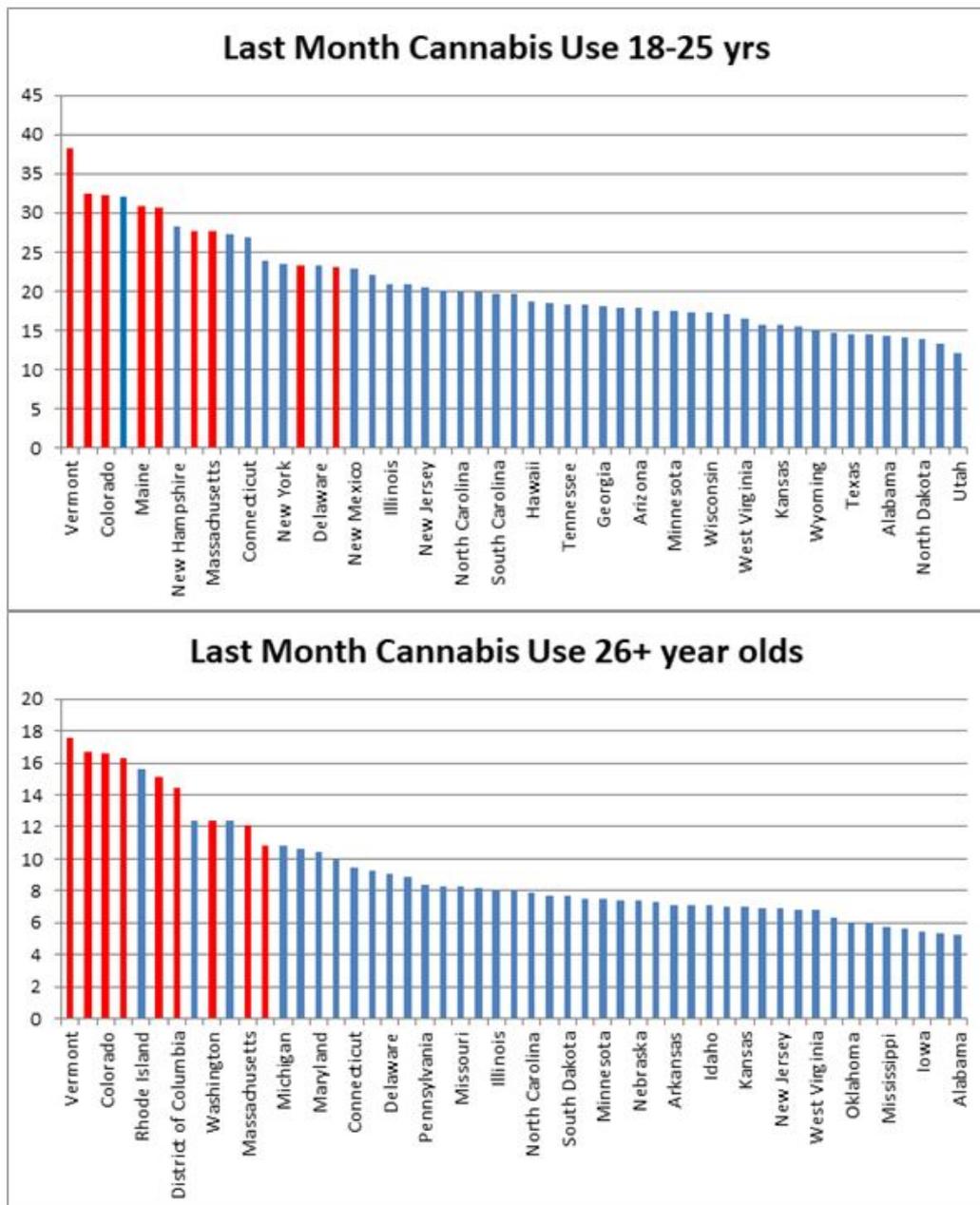


Source: NDS 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995; those who have never tried marijuana are excluded

What has led to the decreases in Colorado for high-school students is not clear, but a factor may well be that schools have mechanisms for social control that other institutions cannot exert on those 18 years and over.

It is fact that cannabis use increased from 2013/2014 to 2015/2016 for 18-25 as well as 26+ year olds. In summary,

- 12-17 year olds - use decreased by 28% (from 12.56% to 9.08%) against decreases of 4% in other states. For 2015/2016, Colorado youth ranked #7 for cannabis use in the United States.
- 18-25 year olds - against increases of 6% nationally, use of cannabis by those of college age rose by 3% (from 31.24% to 32.20%) between 2013/2014 and 2015/2016. In 2015/2016 Colorado college-age students ranked #3 for cannabis use in the United States.
- 26+ year olds - adult use increased by 33% (from 12.45% - 16.62%) against increases of 49% nationally. In 2015/2016 Colorado adults ranked #3 in the United States.
- Contrast to the mushrooming use of cannabis across the United States the Australian Tough on Drugs strategy which reduced Last 12 Month cannabis use from 17.9% in 1998 to 9.1% in 2007. Such exploitation of addiction and public health by the deep pockets of big business, multi-millionaires and billionaires such as George Soros, has not been matched since Big Tobacco was at its height.



To summarise, cannabis legalisation is demonstrably the cause of markedly increased use according to the graphs above, yet the Snopes Fact-Check chose to check on just one indicator which is an outlier, giving a false impression concerning cannabis legalisation and use.

Again, thank you for your time and due consideration on these important facts

Sincerely Yours,

Shane W. Varcoe
Executive Director



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