

# Fact Sheet

## Cannabis-Related Health Education Opportunities

**Missouri Partners in Prevention (PIP) is a higher education substance abuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses.**

The legal landscape and student attitudes regarding cannabis are shifting, increasing the challenges for prevention specialists desiring to select appropriate evidence informed interventions. However, colleges and universities do currently have a number of tools and opportunities to reduce cannabis-related harm among students. In addition, PIP has the significant advantage of the annual Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) which serves as both a means of needs assessment and evaluation of our efforts to reduce harm from cannabis. Prevention specialists will need to continue to follow the national research conversation as additional evidence informed practices are identified over time.

### Protective Behavioral Strategies (PBSs)

Engagement in protective strategies by students who consume alcohol have consistently been encouraged by PIP because they are associated with fewer episodes of heavy drinking and less frequent negative consequences.<sup>1</sup> The MACHB documents this important relationship over time. Preliminary research suggests that protective strategies among college students who use cannabis may also reduce harm, especially among more frequent cannabis users.<sup>2</sup> However, it appears a focus on using a single strategy in a given environment may be more effective with cannabis rather than attempting to use multiple different strategies at once.<sup>3</sup>

### Social Norms

Research is ongoing in regards to the social “rules” that guide college student cannabis-related

behavior. These norms are clearly subject to change as new state legislation takes effect across the United States. Two types of norms monitored by the MACHB are **descriptive norms**

(perceptions about the behaviors of others) and **injunctive norms** (perceptions about the level of others’ approval of behaviors). Evidence indicates that, unsurprisingly, when injunctive norms among family and friends approve of cannabis use and descriptive norms perceive widespread cannabis use, cannabis use by college students is more likely. Thus using social norms campaigns,

**Descriptive norms**  
perceptions about the behaviors of others

**Injunctive norms**  
perceptions about the level of others’ approval of behaviors

**For more information, visit [pip.missouri.edu](http://pip.missouri.edu)**

*Funded by the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health*

when supported by campus MACHB data, to correct misperceptions is recommended. Positive expectations about the benefits of cannabis use (with low perceived harm) and using cannabis to cope are also important predictors of cannabis use among college students.<sup>3</sup> Designing campus-specific peer education programs to address these two factors could potentially be beneficial in reducing cannabis use on campus.

## Policies

---

As state law changes, it is important to review campus policies to be sure it is clear to students that at this time, the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act still prohibits marijuana possession, use or distribution by students, faculty and staff, even medical marijuana. (*Fact Sheet: Marijuana and the Drug-Free Schools and Campuses Act* available at [pip.missouri.edu/docs/briefs/PIP\\_Fact\\_DrugFree.pdf](http://pip.missouri.edu/docs/briefs/PIP_Fact_DrugFree.pdf) provides additional information on this topic.) This is also an opportunity for campuses to review their tobacco and/or smoking policies to be sure vaping of any substance is clearly prohibited.

## Parent Education

---

Campuses may want to share information about cannabis and negative consequences with parents. It is essential that parents understand the increase in THC content that has occurred

Researchers found an increase in THC content in illegal cannabinoids from around 4% in 1995 to about 12% in 2014.

over the last two decades. One recent study of illegal cannabinoids confiscated by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) found an increase from around 4% THC in 1995 to about 12% in 2014. At

the same time the CBD content has fallen, significantly changing the ratio of THC to CBD and increasing the risk of harm to users.<sup>4</sup> (*Fact Sheet: THC and CBD: Understanding the Components of Cannabis* available at [pip.missouri.edu/docs/briefs/PIP\\_Fact\\_THC\\_CBD.pdf](http://pip.missouri.edu/docs/briefs/PIP_Fact_THC_CBD.pdf) provides more information on this topic.) Parent attitudes are an important factor related to injunctive norms both before and after students arrive on campus.

## Bystander Intervention

---

PIP campuses can incorporate cannabis-specific scenarios into their existing bystander interventions programs. For example, campuses may wish to include a situation related to correcting misperceptions about the frequency of others' cannabis use or how to respond when a peer is experiencing negative consequences from over consumption of cannabis. A scenario involving concurrent use of alcohol and cannabis is another possibility.

## The Bottom Line

---

More resources are becoming available to assist campuses in developing effective approaches to addressing high risk cannabis use. PIP's website ([pip.missouri.edu/topics/marijuana.html](http://pip.missouri.edu/topics/marijuana.html)) has a section specific to marijuana that includes scope, data briefs, best practices, national resources, PIP resources and research. In addition, campus coalitions may find the *Higher Education Cannabis Prevention Toolkit* available at on the PIP website or directly from [www.naspa.org/images/uploads/events/Higher\\_Education\\_Cannabis\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/events/Higher_Education_Cannabis_Toolkit.pdf) particularly helpful.

PIP schools are especially fortunate in that they have a strong prevention foundation on which they can build cannabis interventions that have important similarities (and differences) to

---

For more information, visit [pip.missouri.edu](http://pip.missouri.edu)

Funded by the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health

the alcohol and sexual violence risk reduction programs currently in place. The MACHB is another asset that ensures PIP campuses have the ability to annually monitor changes in student behavior, attitudes, beliefs and consequences related to cannabis. The changes in state regulation of cannabis may seem a bit overwhelming to campuses already struggling to find adequate resources for addressing student health promotion needs over a wide range of issues. However PIP campuses have built a structure for planning, implementing and evaluating prevention interventions that will serve us well as we transition to an environment where medical marijuana may be available for purchase at licensed facilities sometime after January 2020 in Missouri.

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

Report prepared August 19, 2019 by Roberta E. Donahue, PhD, MCHES. Published August 20, 2019.

1. Borden, L. A., Martens, M. P., McBride, M. A., Sheline, K. T., Bloch, K. K., & Dude, K. (2011). The role of college students' use of protective behavioral strategies in the relation between binge drinking and alcohol-related problems. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 25, 346-351.
2. Pederson, E. R., Hummer, J. F., Rinker, D. V., Traylor, Z. K., & Neighbors, C. (2016). Measuring Protective Behavioral Strategies for Marijuana Use among young adults. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 77, 441-450.
3. Coalition of Colorado Campus Alcohol and Drug Educators (CADE). Higher education cannabis prevention toolkit.
4. ElSohly, M. A., Mehmedic, Z., Foster, S., Gon, C., Chandra, S., & Church, J. C. (2016). Changes in cannabis potency over the last 2 decades (1995-2014): Analysis of current data in the United States. *Biological Psychiatry*, 79, 613-619.

---

**For more information, visit [pip.missouri.edu](http://pip.missouri.edu)**

*Funded by the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health*