PROTECTING YOUTH FROM ADOLESCENT CANNABIS USE THROUGH EVIDENCE-INFORMED REGULATORY POLICY

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OVERVIEW

- Cannabis is now legal for recreational use in 10 states and D.C, and for medical use in a further 33 states, but remains illegal for possession or use under federal law
- Cannabis has the highest rate of use among adolescents of illicit substances, and the health risks of adolescent use remain unclear
- However, policies to protect youth from harms associated with cannabis use have not been systematically applied
- The impact of public health efforts to reduce youth cannabis use may be limited by substantial policy gaps

CONTEXT
Problem

- Policy gaps are likely to be exploited by a rapidly growing cannabis industry
- Experience from the tobacco and alcohol industries suggest that cannabis manufacturers will aggressively target youth
- State regulatory regimes license manufacturers to produce and sell cannabis products, including edibles and vaporizers
- These products use targeted advertising and packaging, combined with ease and concealment of use, to appeal to youth
- Rigorous evidence-informed policy strategies are needed to control cannabis industry targeting of young people with potentially harmful products.
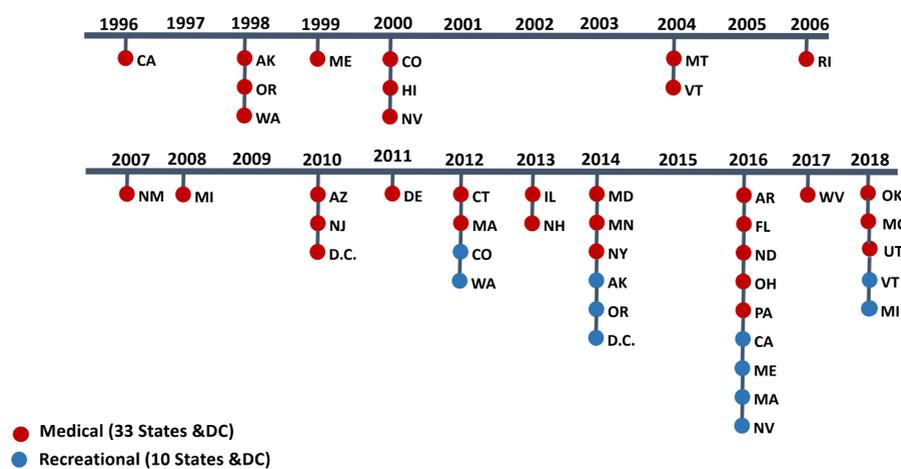
Population

- Adolescence is a critical developmental stage in which risky health behaviors can impact current and future adult health
- Adolescents are more prone to engaging in risky behaviors, including substance use
- Cannabis use in adolescents can impair learning and memory, impede the attainment of social and educational milestones, and may lead to adverse health outcomes
- Evidence-informed policy interventions to prevent or delay initiation of cannabis use among adolescent are therefore critical
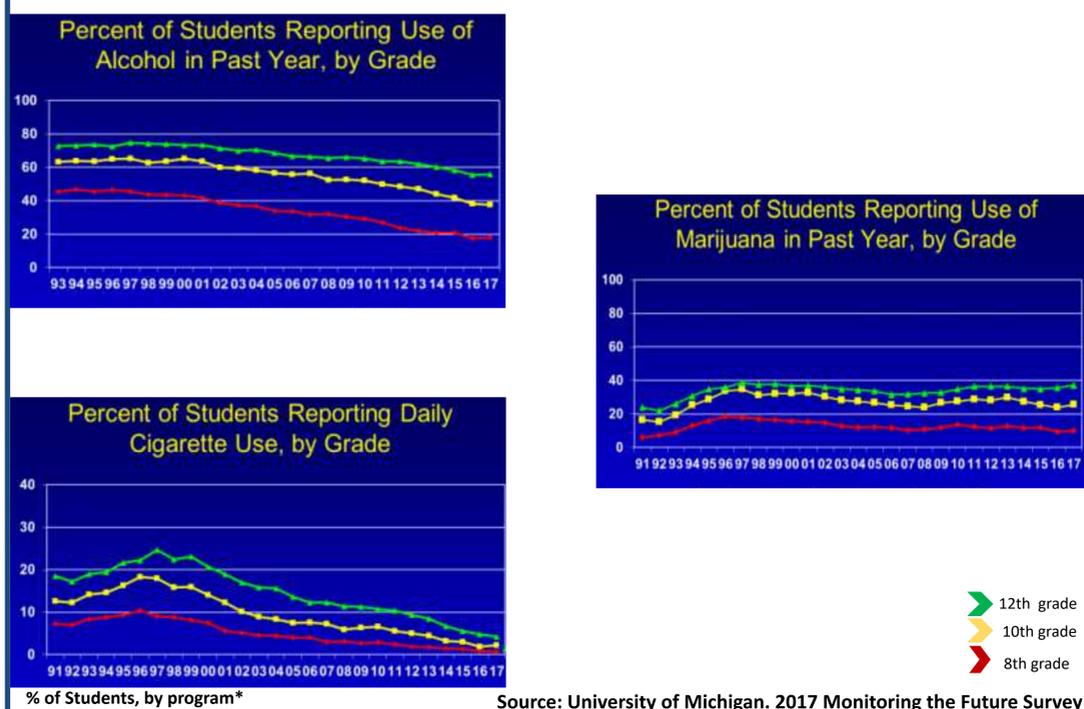
Purpose

- High-quality evidence is needed to inform cannabis control policies.
- Our goal is to help shape cannabis control policies using best practices from alcohol and tobacco control approaches. (Refer to graph)
- A framework model for youth cannabis prevention is proposed, which identifies factors that influence youth risk for cannabis use
- Cannabis prevention regulatory approaches are thus developed from this framework
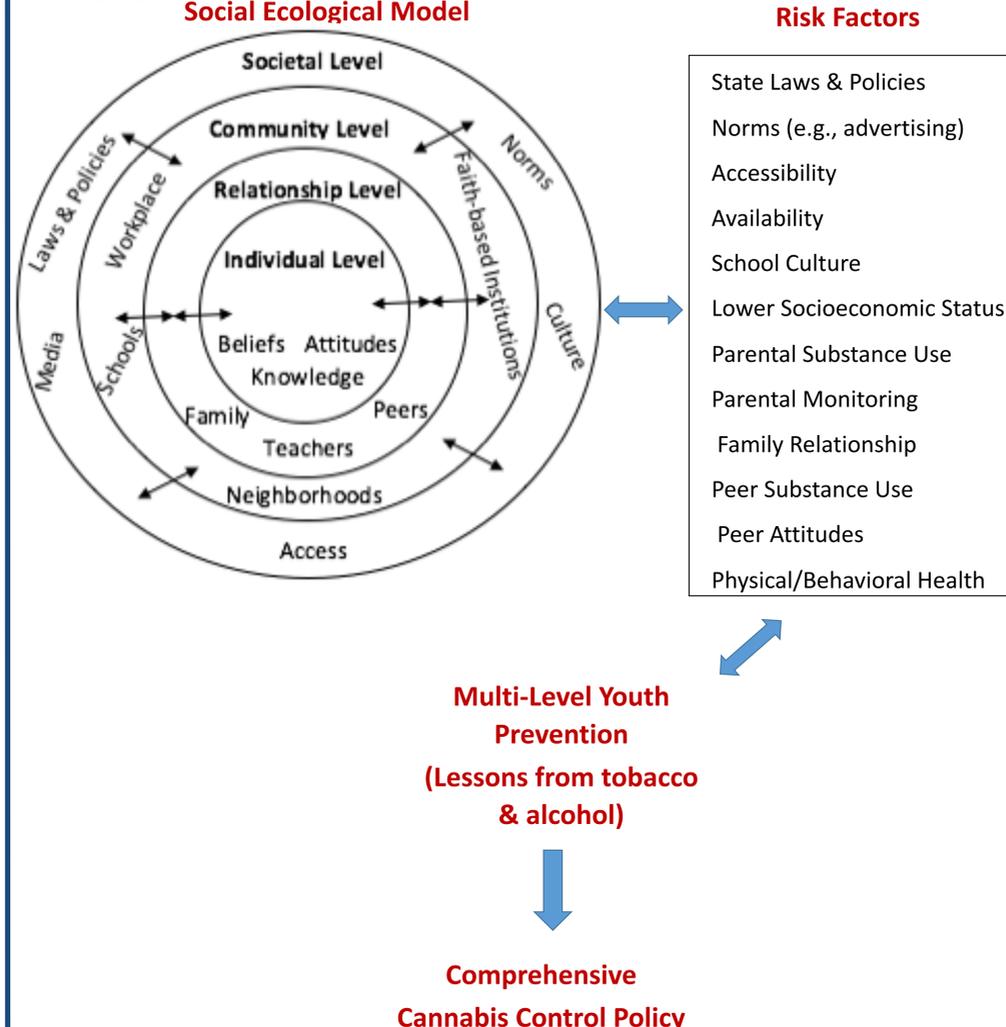
CANNABIS LEGALIZATION ROADMAP

- Medical (33 States &DC)
- Recreational (10 States &DC)

RATES OF ALCOHOL, CIGARETTE, AND MARIJUANA YOUTH USE

Percent of Students Reporting Use of Alcohol in Past Year, by Grade

Percent of Students Reporting Use of Marijuana in Past Year, by Grade

Percent of Students Reporting Daily Cigarette Use, by Grade

- 12th grade
- 10th grade
- 8th grade

% of Students, by program*   Source: University of Michigan. 2017 Monitoring the Future Survey

APPROACH

Social Ecological Model

Risk Factors

- State Laws & Policies
- Norms (e.g., advertising)
- Accessibility
- Availability
- School Culture
- Lower Socioeconomic Status
- Parental Substance Use
- Parental Monitoring
- Family Relationship
- Peer Substance Use
- Peer Attitudes
- Physical/Behavioral Health

Multi-Level Youth Prevention
(Lessons from tobacco & alcohol)

Comprehensive Cannabis Control Policy

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THE EVIDENCE BASE

Key Prevention Strategies: Lessons Learned From Alcohol & Tobacco

Successes from youth alcohol and tobacco prevention hold much promise for informing a multi-level model of youth cannabis prevention

Successes

- In 2017, past-year use of illicit drugs other than marijuana was at the lowest levels in over two decades.
- Alcohol use show a significant 5 year decline among youth.
- The % of high school teens who reported ever using alcohol dropped by as much as 60% to peak years.
- Use of traditional cigarettes has continued to decline reaching lowest % levels.

DISCUSSION
Designing Cannabis Policies

The proposed framework can inform empirically-informed approaches for cannabis prevention, organized at the societal, community, and relationship level.

Societal Level

- Excise taxes
- Keep prices high
- Monitor Licenses
- Penalties/Detention
- Measure impaired driving
- FDA regulations for cannabis products
- State monopoly
- Restrict marketing
- Smoke-free environments

Community Level

- Social Marketing
- Media Advocacy
- Citizen action to reduce commercial cannabis
- Health education
- Youth organizations
- Faith-based institutions
- School strategies

Relationship Level

- Family Strategies
- School Strategies
- Programs that speak to youth and parents
- Health education

Challenges and Concerns

- Full benefit of policy changes may take several years to manifest.

Future Directions

- Further research required on:
  - health risks of cannabis use among adolescents
  - relationship between cannabis and other substances (particularly alcohol).
- Surveillance data on price, potency, methods of consumption, exposure to advertising and use patterns