

Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control
“Marijuana and America’s Health: Questions and Issues for
Policy Makers”

Wednesday, October 23, 2019 at 2:30 p.m.

Prepared Statement of Chairman John Cornyn of Texas

- * Good afternoon. I would like to thank our witnesses and members of the caucus for being here today.
- * So far this year, the work of this Caucus has centered largely on efforts to prevent addictive substances from entering our country and infiltrating our communities.
- * Today’s hearing will allow us to discuss the most commonly used illicit drug in the United States – one that, for its prominence – we know surprisingly little about.
- * A 2018 [report](#) by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found that an estimated 43.5 million Americans used marijuana in the past year.
- * The percentage of the population 12 and older currently using marijuana has increased in recent years—from under seven percent in 2010 to more than ten percent in 2018.
- * While marijuana is still a prohibited drug under federal law, over 90 percent of the states allow for the medical

use of marijuana in some capacity, and ten states and the District of Columbia now allow for the recreational use of marijuana.

- * Despite the growing acceptance and accessibility of this drug and its derivatives, we lack definitive evidence on the short- and long- term health implications of marijuana use.
- * That's especially true for vulnerable populations like adolescents, pregnant women, and individuals with mental health issues.
- * Earlier this year the Surgeon General, Dr. Jerome Adams – who we are glad to have with us today – issued an advisory that highlighted the risks of marijuana use for pregnant and nursing women, and adolescents.
- * I remain concerned about the lack of conclusive evidence regarding health risks for these groups, as well as the general population.
- * In 2017, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine published one of the most [comprehensive studies](#) on the research of the health effects of recreational and therapeutic use of marijuana and cannabis-derived products.

- * The report included nearly 100 conclusions. They found conclusive or substantial evidence that cannabis or cannabinoids – but not necessarily marijuana or marijuana-derived cannabinoids – are an effective treatment for chronic pain, chemotherapy-induced nausea, and vomiting.
- * However, they found insufficient or no evidence regarding potential therapeutic effects of cannabis or cannabinoids for a variety of health conditions examined.
- * Additionally, they found substantial evidence that marijuana use increased the risk of motor vehicle crashes, the development of schizophrenia or other psychoses, and complications in pregnancy like lower birth weight.
- * It is vital that we look at how to properly research and evaluate these claims to ensure patient safety.
- * In 2018, the Food and Drug Administration approved the first drug with an active ingredient derived from marijuana to treat rare, severe forms of epilepsy.
- * It was only after rigorous studies, and through review by FDA, that physicians can have confidence in the safety, efficacy, and consistency of that drug.

- * All this is to say that there are still many questions that need to be answered.
- * The Surgeon General, Dr. Volkow [VOLK-owv], and the experts on our second panel will help shed light on what science tells us about the public health risks of marijuana, and what we still need to learn.
- * I look forward to hearing their testimony and discussing how we can work to prevent youth access to marijuana, and properly evaluate the safety and efficacy of any therapies that utilize marijuana and cannabinoids.
- * I will now turn it over my co-chairman Senator Feinstein for her opening remarks.