Relationship Between Marijuana and Opioids

Cannabis access is associated with reduced rates of opioid use and abuse, opioid-related hospitalizations, opioid-related traffic fatalities, opioid-related drug treatment admissions, and opioid-related overdose deaths

"Results provide evidence that MMLs may be effective at reducing opioid reliance as survey respondents living in states with medical cannabis legislation are much less apt to report using opioid analgesics than people living in states without such laws."
"The effects of cannabis laws on opioid use, International Journal of Drug Policy, 2019"

"Substitution of marijuana for opioids, which included a substantial degree of opioid discontinuation (~20 percent), was common. Our findings are consistent with prior surveys of American and Canadian marijuana users in which substitution of marijuana for opioids was prevalent due to better symptom management and fewer adverse and withdrawal effects."
"Substitution of marijuana for opioids in a national survey of US adults, PLOS One"

Cannabis access is associated with reductions in overall prescription drug spending

"Findings from this systematic review show that MMLs are associated with a modest reduction in opioid prescriptions. Specifically, implementation of MMLs (medical marijuana laws) is associated with a 7% reduction in opioid prescriptions."
"State marijuana laws and opioid overdose mortality, Injury Epidemiology, 2019"

The adjunctive use of cannabis augments the analgesic properties of opioids

"In this exploratory CEA (cost effective analysis) of smoked cannabis for neuropathic pain, we found augmentation of standard therapy agents for neuropathic pain with smoked cannabis to be cost-effective over the short- and long-term. ... Judicious use of medicinal cannabis alongside standard therapy agents may be particularly beneficial to patients with refractory pain and to active cannabis users."
"A cost-effective model for adjunctive smoked cannabis in the treatment of chronic neuropathic pain, Cannabis and Cannabinoid Research, 2019"

Patients often use cannabis as a substitute for other controlled substances, including prescription medications, alcohol, and tobacco

"Participants [in the study] were 93 US military veterans and members of the Santa Cruz Veterans' Alliance (SCVA). ... The majority of participants reported that they use cannabis as a substitute for other licit and illicit substances. ... [P]articipants reported a high degree of substitution behavior, particularly for alcohol. ... [N]early half the sample reported substituting cannabis for prescription medications. ... The current study also confirms the findings of previous studies that have documented a trend in substitution behavior, where cannabis is substituted for other drugs, which, if associated with reduced harm, could be beneficial for overall health."
"A cross-sectional examination of choice and behavior of veterans with access to free medicinal cannabis, The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse, 2019"

"The aim of the study was to investigate the characteristics, safety, and effectiveness of medical cannabis therapy for fibromyalgia. ... Most patients ceased, reduced, or at least did not change the dosage of their chronic drugs for fibromyalgia while receiving medical cannabis. At six months, 28
out of 126 patients (22.2%) stopped or reduced their dosage of opioids, and 24 out of 118 (20.3%) reduced their dosage of benzodiazepines. ... Considering the low rates of addiction and serious adverse effects (especially compared to opioids), cannabis therapy should be considered to ease the symptom burden among those fibromyalgia patients who are not responding to standard care."

The safety and efficacy of medical cannabis in fibromyalgia, Journal of Clinical Medicine, 2019

**Chronic pain patients are less likely to abuse medicinal cannabis as compared to opioids**

"Generally, rates of problematic use of MC (medicinal cannabis) among MC users seem lower than rates of problematic use of opioids among those prescribed opioids,"

Problematic use of prescription opioids and medicinal cannabis among patients suffering from chronic pain, Pain Medicine, 2016

**Chronic pain patients are less likely to become depressed using medical cannabis**

"Prevalence of depression among patients in the OP (opioids), MM (medical marijuana) and OPMM groups was 57.1%, 22.3% and 51.4%, respectively and rates of anxiety were 48.4%, 21.5% and 38.7%, respectively. ... Levels of depression and anxiety are higher among chronic pain patients receiving prescription opioids compared to those receiving MM. Findings should be taken into consideration when deciding on the most appropriate treatment modality for chronic pain, particularly among those at risk for depression and anxiety."

Depression and anxiety among chronic pain patients receiving prescription opioids and medical marijuana, Journal of Affective Disorders, 2017

**Cannabis use is associated with greater rates of opioid use treatment retention and may mitigate opioid-related cravings**

"Many chronic pain patients are prescribed opioids at doses exceeding the current Guideline. Tapering the dose can be difficult, as patients fear a return to a state of overwhelming pain. Several factors can increase the likelihood of success: the patient’s readiness for change, psychological support, pharmacological support and careful monitoring. This pilot study addressed these four factors. Six hundred patients took part. Each was taking daily opioid doses ranging from 90-240 mg morphine equivalent dose (MED). All indicated they were prepared to reduce their opioid dose. Over a six-month period, opioid doses were tapered according to individual needs, usually 10% every 1-2 weeks. ... After 6 months, 156 patients (26%) had ceased taking opioids. An additional 329 patients (55%) had reduced their opioid use by an average of 30%. ... Medical cannabis provided pharmacological support throughout the tapering process ... [and] was very helpful to many patients. ... The positive results justify further investigation.

A pilot study of a medical cannabis – opioid reduction program, American Journal of Psychiatry and Neuroscience, 2019