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

"Analyzing a dataset of over 1.3 billion individual opioid prescriptions between 2011 and 2017, which were aggregated to the individual provider-year level, we find that recreational and medical cannabis access laws reduce the number of morphine milligram equivalents prescribed each year by 6.9 and 6.1 percent, respectively. These laws also reduce the total days supply of opioids prescribed, the total number of patients receiving opioids, and the probability a provider prescribes any opioids net of any offsetting effects."

The impact of cannabis access laws on opioid prescribing, University of Alabama Legal Studies Research Paper No. 3266629, 2018

"This study examined whether statewide medical cannabis legalization was associated with reduction in opioids received by Medicaid enrollees. ...For Schedule III opioid prescriptions, medical cannabis legalization was associated with a 29.6 percent reduction in number of prescriptions, 29.9 percent reduction in dosage, and 28.8 percent reduction in related Medicaid spending. ... Statewide medical cannabis legalization appears to have been associated with reductions in both prescriptions and dosages of Schedule III (but not Schedule II) opioids received by Medicaid enrollees in the US. ... It was estimated that, if all the states had legalized medical cannabis by 2014, Medicaid annual spending on opioid prescriptions would be reduced by 17.8 million dollars."

Medical cannabis legalization and opioid prescriptions: Evidence of US Medicaid enrollees during 1993-2014, Addiction, 2018

Cannabis access is associated with reductions in overall prescription drug spending

"This longitudinal analysis of Medicare PartD found that prescriptions filled for all opioids decreased by 2.11 million daily doses per year from an average of 23.08 million daily doses per year when a state instituted any medical cannabis law. Prescriptions for all opioids decreased by 3.742 million daily doses per year when medical cannabis dispensaries opened. ... Combined with previously published studies suggesting cannabis laws are associated with lower opioid mortality, these findings further strengthen arguments in favor of considering medical applications of cannabis as one tool in the policy arsenal that can be used to diminish the harm of prescription opioids."

Association between US state medical cannabis laws and opioid prescribing in the Medicare Part D population, JAMA Internal Medicine, 2018

The adjunctive use of cannabis augments the analgesic properties of opioids

"The reduction of opioid dosing when used in combination with cannabis/cannabinoids reduces side effects and allows for easier detoxification and weaning due to less of a tolerance and withdrawal from opiates, and rekindling of opiate analgesia after prior dosages have worn off. Because of the cannabis-opioid synergistic interactions as suggested by available data, cannabis has been suggested as a tool in the opioid detoxification and weaning process. .... Unfortunately, most chronic pain management programs have rules and “opioid contracts” mandating patients to be free of cannabis/cannabinoid use for enrollment and ongoing treatment. Given the abundance of evidence-based medicine and research on cannabinoid-opioid synergy, these policies seem quite outdated and should be re-evaluated. Patients using cannabis/cannabinoids may inadvertently be assisting..."
their own detox and weaning from opiates. Chronic pain management programs should harness this potential benefit within their treatment program and use it to their patients’ advantage."

Medicinal properties of cannabinoids, terpenes, and flavonoids in cannabis, and benefits in migraine, headache and pain: An update on current evidence and cannabis science, Headache, 2018

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

"The aim of this study is to characterize the epidemiology of cancer patients receiving medical cannabis treatment and describe the safety and efficacy of this therapy. ... We analyzed the data routinely collected as part of the treatment program of 2970 cancer patients treated with medical cannabis between 2015 and 2017. ... A total of 1013 patients responded to the medication chapter before and during treatment. At intake these patients took together 3982 regularly used drugs (medications they take regularly). 35.1% reported a decreased in their drugs consumption, mainly in the following families: other analgesics and antipyretics, hypnotics and sedatives, corticosteroids and opioids. Opioids, for example, was the most prevalent drug consumed by 344 patients (33.9%) at intake, 36% of them stopped taking opioids [and] 9.9% decreased [their] dose."

Prospective analysis of safety and efficacy of medical cannabis in large unselected population of patients with cancer, European Journal of Internal Medicine, 2018

**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**

"The evidence summarized in this article demonstrates the potential cannabis has to ease opioid withdrawal symptoms, reduce opioid consumption, ameliorate opioid cravings, prevent opioid relapse, improve OUD treatment retention, and reduce overdose deaths. ... Adjunct cannabis use alongside current treatment strategies could help to improve the number of individuals engaging in OUD treatment, as well as increase treatment retention rates."

Emerging evidence for cannabis' role in opioid use disorder, Cannabis and Cannabinoid Research, 2018