

MEDIA RELEASE

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The 2016 California Marijuana Initiative and Youth: Lessons from Alcohol Policy Ventura County Releases Policy Report

(OXNARD, Calif.) – The Ventura County Behavioral Health Department today released a policy report, “The 2016 California Marijuana Initiative and Youth: Lessons from Alcohol Policy”, by James F. Mosher, JD., Alcohol Policy Consultations. This report examines claims made on behalf of the California initiative entitled the “Control, Regulate and Tax Adult Use of Marijuana Act (AUMA). The AUMA initiative would legalize non-medical use of marijuana and has qualified for California’s November 2016 ballot as Proposition 64. The report gives a detailed analysis of its legal provisions, drawing from the experience and research findings from the alcohol policy field. Its purpose is to educate voters, policymakers, and the public regarding the actual provisions of the initiative and their likely impact on young people, going beyond the political slogans and sound bites both for and against the initiative that are likely to dominate the campaign.

“We looked closely at two of the main claims of AUMA and, from a policy standpoint, it is imperfect at best because it doesn’t follow the best science we have from alcohol policy on protecting youth,” said James Mosher. “We still have lessons from alcohol and tobacco that need to be applied. If AUMA is enacted, Californians should anticipate increased youth availability of marijuana, aggressive marketing by cannabis companies that put young people at risk, and a marijuana industry that consolidates into a small number of politically powerful, and highly profitable corporations.” Protecting youth should be a critical goal for any marijuana legalization effort, including AUMA. As discussed in the report, marijuana poses heightened risks to young people up to the age of 25.

According to Mosher, a major lesson from alcohol policy is the importance of a robust local regulatory structure to address industry marketing practices and reduce underage drinking problems, particularly when state controls are weak. City and county governments could similarly play an important role in reducing the adverse impacts of AUMA should it be enacted. Many of the best practice measures identified could serve as a guide for local governments to develop comprehensive local regulatory structures that better protect youth from harm caused by marijuana and deter industry consolidation.

“For the last five years, Ventura County Behavioral Health has been focusing on a topic that should be a priority for any informed discussion on marijuana - the effects of cannabis use on the developing teen brain,” said Patrick Zarate, Chief Operations Officer for the Behavioral Health Department, and Alcohol and Drug Programs Division Manager. “This report, commissioned by our Department, is the latest in a series of publications that we hope will inform these important discussions about how to protect public health and safety—especially for youth, who are particularly vulnerable to the effects of heavy use.”

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