

Minnesota Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

January 19, 2023

Dear Legislator:

The Minnesota Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (MSCAP) is a group of more than two hundred Board Certified physicians. We are concerned about the lack of attention to youth who will be harmed by HF100 in its current version. As physicians specialized in child and adolescent psychiatry, we are conversant with the developmental and emotional needs of youth as the clinical focus of our physicians is the mental health of young people. We treat youth with illnesses such as autism, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and substance use disorder. The care is delivered in the context of their family and the relationships and support that the family contributes to their wellbeing.

Two of our main concerns with the current cannabis legalization bill are the legal age of cannabis consumption and the potency of the cannabis product. The science of neurodevelopment is clear. The human brain does not finish growing neurons and connecting them to each other until age 25. Cannabis interacts with the endocannabinoid neurophysiological system and changes the connections between brain cells. The synapse, which is where the cells connect, establish a balance between over or under excitation determined by neurochemicals that are altered by cannabis. The result is overexcitation that in some cases results in long term psychosis and in others depression and anxiety. The unit of the cell that is out of balance, the synapse, can remain so for many years. This is why we are appealing to the authors to set the legal age of purchase at 25. This would be an improvement of Minnesota's cannabis legalization over any other in the country.

Secondly there must be limits on potency. The effect of cannabis on the brain is determined by the toxicity of the active ingredient, namely delta 9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).

The higher the potency of THC in the plant the more damage done to the brain. There are scientific studies in well-respected peer reviewed journal of medicine of adults and children that show a decrement in intelligence over time when high potency THC is consumed. For this reason, MSCAP appeals to the legislature to cap the potency at 15% for the plant and flower.

MSCAP is supportive of other mental health and medical agencies that are using the scientific literature to make HF 100 a better bill. Here is the position on cannabis of the Minnesota Medical Association:

1. Research has consistently shown that human brain development and maturation is not complete until the age of 25. Therefore, individuals under age 25 should be prohibited from purchasing, possessing, or using cannabis or cannabis-infused products.
2. Cannabis use may increase the risk of developing psychiatric disorders, including psychosis (schizophrenia), depression and anxiety, particularly among individuals with a pre-existing genetic or other vulnerability. Public awareness of these risks is not well understood.
3. During pregnancy, cannabis use may increase the risk of low birth weight. In addition, prenatal cannabis exposure before or after maternal knowledge of pregnancy may increase the risk for psychopathology during middle childhood. Again, public awareness of these risks is limited.

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4. Current addiction treatment capacity and resources are insufficient. Cannabis use may increase the risk of developing substance use disorders and further strain addiction treatment availability.
5. Children and adolescents, (in particular), face risks from various cannabis inhalation delivery systems, ingestion of edibles and exposure to secondhand smoke or vapor.
6. Tobacco and alcohol experiences have demonstrated the importance of strict product packaging, marketing, sales and advertising regulations to prevent use by children, adolescents and other at-risk individuals.
7. Ongoing monitoring of health impacts, through data collection and analysis, is essential.

As with many issues, I appreciate that this is not a simple decision. There are pros and cons of the status quo, and there are pros and cons of change. It will be up to policymakers to make the final calculation. As physicians, we will continue to urge policymakers to learn from the past and lead with health.

Here is the position of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill Minnesota (NAMI) on HF 100: "The legislation creates an "Office of Cannabis Management" and a "Cannabis Advisory Council." We will advocate for much more mental health professional and advocate experience on these bodies. We also have great concerns with many powers and responsibilities that the office has including studying the funding and service needs of the substance use disorder (SUD) and mental health system and recommending funding and even administering SUD grants to providers.

The bill has provisions for education for youth and pregnant people, but we would like to see these strengthened. Some information is required for warning labels, but other information is not included such as warning on the intoxicating effects of the substance, warnings for pregnant people and more. We could not find clear language that would set limits for the potency of products. The legal age to purchase and use products is 21. We would advocate for 25."

There are extensive provisions for helping people expunge previous cannabis-related crimes and we are supportive of these provisions.

There is much that needs to be done to create a bill that will be acceptable to the mental health community. We understand the pressure of the cannabis industry and even the general public most of whom are unaware of the physiological harms of the THC substance. There is a lot of work that we have ahead of us in learning the science, applying to policy and informing your constituents. We want to be supportive of your work in the legislature and would be happy to meet to develop a plan of action.

Sincerely,



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