Licensed Non-Medical Cannabis Retail Access and High School Outcomes in Washington State

This report is part of a larger legislative mandate to assess the long-term public health, safety, and economic impacts of Initiative 502 over a 20-year period. In this report, we specifically focus on outcomes related to high school performance.

Background

Although Initiative 502 did not legalize cannabis consumption and purchase for those under the age of 21, evidence has suggested that exposure to cannabis retail and retail-related advertising predicts higher rates of adolescent cannabis use. This study examines the relationship between school proximity to cannabis retailers and high school outcomes.

Findings

- Students attending a school located within five minutes of a cannabis retailer have a 7% higher number of average monthly unexcused absences and a 2.5% lower likelihood of graduating high school in four years.
- Among 12th-graders in rural regions, school proximity to a retailer also relates to a 48% higher likelihood of an annual cannabis-related disciplinary occurrence.
- A larger number of nearby retailers relates to more unexcused absences (one more retailer correlates with a 3% increase).

Limitations

- More data are required to examine the potential mitigating impacts of school-based cannabis prevention strategies.
- Other school and neighborhood characteristics, which we cannot account for, may explain some of the differences in school outcomes.

Assignment Details

Assigned by initiative 502 in 2012
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