



# FACT SHEET: CANNABIS LEGALIZATION & REGULATION IN HAWAI'I

Like alcohol prohibition a century ago, prohibition has failed. It wastes taxpayer dollars, perpetuates racial disparities, puts consumers at risk, and locks people up for minor offenses in overcrowded jails and prisons. Legalization and regulation grows the economy, increases freedom, and promotes health and safety.



## Cannabis Prohibition Ruins Lives; Sensible Legalization Invests in Communities

Hawai'i's cannabis laws needlessly ensnare hundreds of people — disproportionately Native Hawaiian people — in its criminal justice system every year.<sup>6</sup> Long after jail sentences are complete and fines are paid, cannabis arrest records derail lives, making it hard to get a job, education, and housing.<sup>7</sup>

### The 2025 legalization bill would stop destroying lives over cannabis and uplift communities, by:

- legalizing the possession and discreet cultivation of modest amounts of cannabis for adults 21 and older
- expunging records for simple cannabis possession
- generating tens of millions of dollars in annual revenue for Hawaii's needs, including the General Fund, public health, and programs to promote youth resiliency

### Legalization Enables Regulation and Control

Prohibition makes control impossible. Illicit sellers have no reason to check IDs. Unregulated cannabis is often contaminated by molds, hazardous pesticides, heavy metals, and it can be laced with fentanyl.<sup>8</sup>

### The legalization bill regulates both cannabis and hemp. It:

- makes public health and safety regulators' top priorities
- mandates lab testing, potency labeling, warnings, and seed-to-sale tracking
- prohibits those under 21 from entering cannabis stores
- requires plain, child-resistant packaging that is re-sealable
- prohibits public smoking and smoking in a vehicle
- mandates point-of-sale handouts educating about cannabis' risks and safe storage
- allows regulators to ban products detrimental to health

**58%**

of Hawai'i residents support legalizing adult-use cannabis<sup>1</sup>

**54%**

of Americans live in a legal cannabis state or territory<sup>2</sup>

**19%**

of Hawai'i adults used cannabis in the past year<sup>3</sup>

**\$112k**

cost per year for Hawai'i to incarcerate one person<sup>4</sup>

**1/3**

of those incarcerated for drugs offense are Native Hawaiian<sup>5</sup>

# Myth vs. Reality

Opponents of cannabis legalization rely on fear-based rhetoric — not facts. Prohibitionists claim cannabis legalization leads to increased youth use and crime, and that it will hurt tourism. These claims are at odds with the facts.

## “Legalization will increase youth cannabis use.”

➤ CDC data shows that high schoolers’ marijuana use rates have *decreased* in almost all legal states.<sup>9</sup>

## “Legalization will make roads more dangerous.”

➤ Driving under the influence of cannabis would remain illegal, and posters in cannabis stores would warn of the danger. Taxes could be used to train more police to detect impaired drivers.

## “Psychosis will increase.”

➤ Research shows that “compared with no legalization policy, states with legalization policies experienced no statistically significant increase in rates of psychosis-related diagnoses or prescribed antipsychotics.”<sup>10</sup>

## “Legalization will increase crime.”

➤ Legalization has also not substantially affected crime rates, and, according to a multi-year study of Colorado and Washington, may have improved crime clearance rates.<sup>11</sup>

## “Japanese tourists will stop coming to Hawaii. Full stop.”

➤ Visit California data shows trips from Japan went up, not down, post-legalization.<sup>12</sup>

## “Legalization costs more than it brings in.”

➤ Nonsense. The claim is based on a shoddy report that was lambasted by the press as “laughable” and “junk science.”<sup>13</sup> Nevada brought in \$177 million in cannabis taxes in 2023.<sup>14</sup> Adjusted to a 14% sales tax rate and Hawaii’s population, that would be \$50.1 million.

## 58% of Hawai’i residents support legalizing and regulating cannabis.<sup>1</sup>

Legalization moves sales above ground so consumers can buy a regulated product and workers don’t face felonies. Instead of tearing apart families and pouring millions of tax dollars down the drain, Hawai’i should regulate cannabis and invest in youth, impacted communities, and public health and safety.

## Adults Shouldn’t Be Punished for Cannabis

Cannabis is less toxic, less addictive, and less harmful to the body than alcohol.

The CDC reports the chronic health impacts of alcohol cause 117,000 deaths per year.<sup>15</sup> Cannabis hasn’t been shown to increase mortality rates.<sup>16</sup>

Most cannabis consumers use it as an over-the-counter medicine, often for sleep (61%) and pain relief (48%). 82% use cannabis to unwind. 16% use it to replace or reduce alcohol use.<sup>17</sup>

Only 2.6% of Hawai’i residents are registered medical cannabis patients;<sup>18</sup> while 19% of adults admit to having used cannabis in the past year. The rest face a misdemeanor conviction and possible jail time if they possess even ½ ounce of cannabis.<sup>19</sup>

Hawai’i should treat adults like grown ups. Sensible regulations and education — not the heavy hand of criminal law — are the best approach to address cannabis’ risks.



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