



INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
FOR SCIENCE IN DRUG POLICY



**Tools for Debate:
US Federal Government Data on
Cannabis Prohibition**

A report of the International Centre for Science in Drug Policy

TOOLS FOR DEBATE: US Federal Government Data on Cannabis Prohibition



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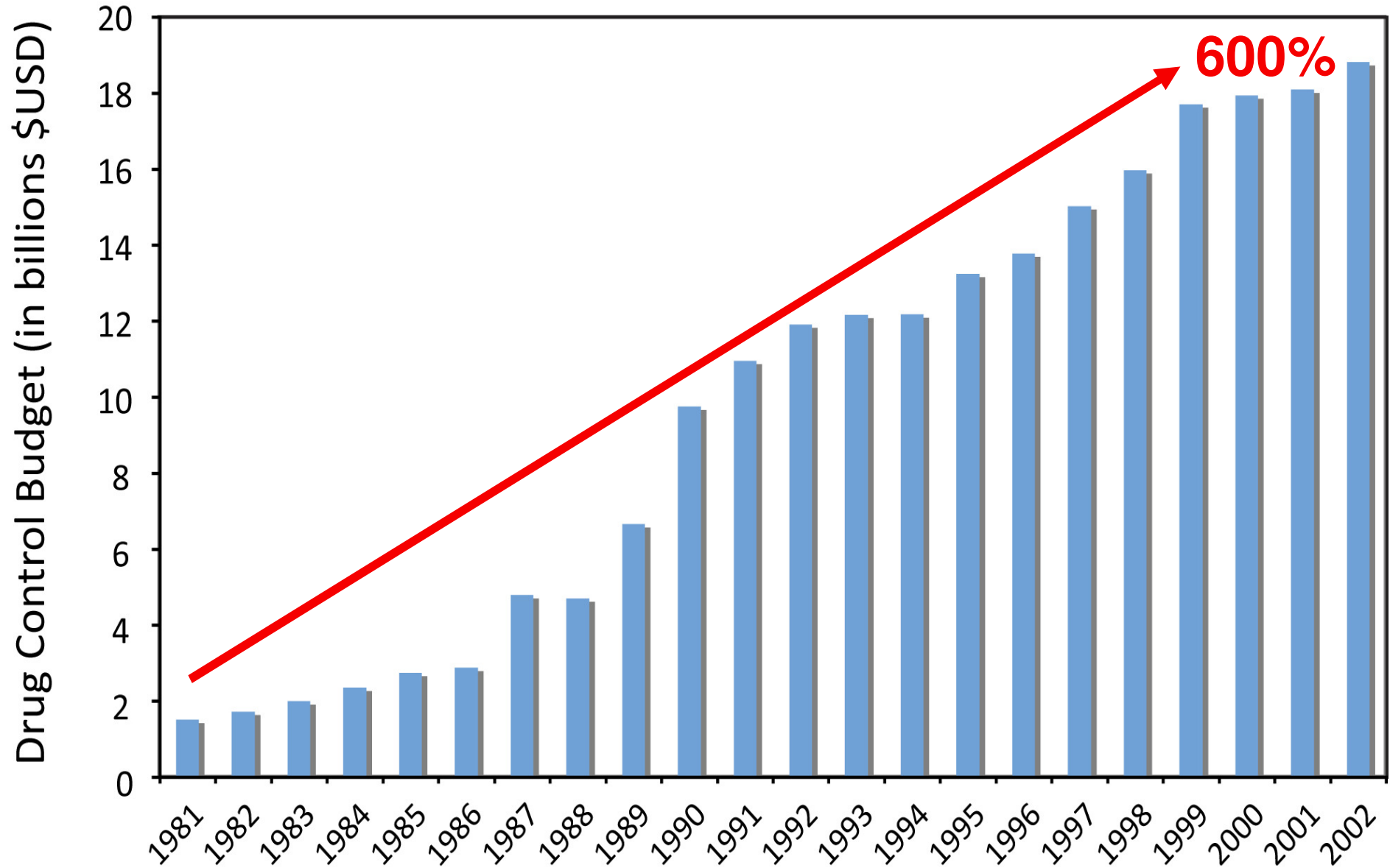
OVERVIEW OF REPORT

- Draws upon 20 years of data from US federal government funded surveillance systems
- Summarizes data on impacts of cannabis prohibition, specifically cannabis seizures and cannabis-related arrests
- Assesses the assumption that increased law enforcement funding reduces cannabis-related harms, using markers of:
 - » Cannabis potency
 - » Cannabis price
 - » Availability
 - » Rates of use
- Describes evidence-based regulatory tools that may reduce cannabis-related harms if cannabis were legalized
- Has been peer-reviewed and has been endorsed by 65 MDs and PhDs in 28 countries

PROHIBITION FUNDING, CANNABIS SEIZURES AND ARRESTS

- Between 1981 and 2002, the United States government spent \$217 billion (USD) on their anti-drug efforts

Figure 1. United States Federal Drug Control Budget, 1981 - 2002

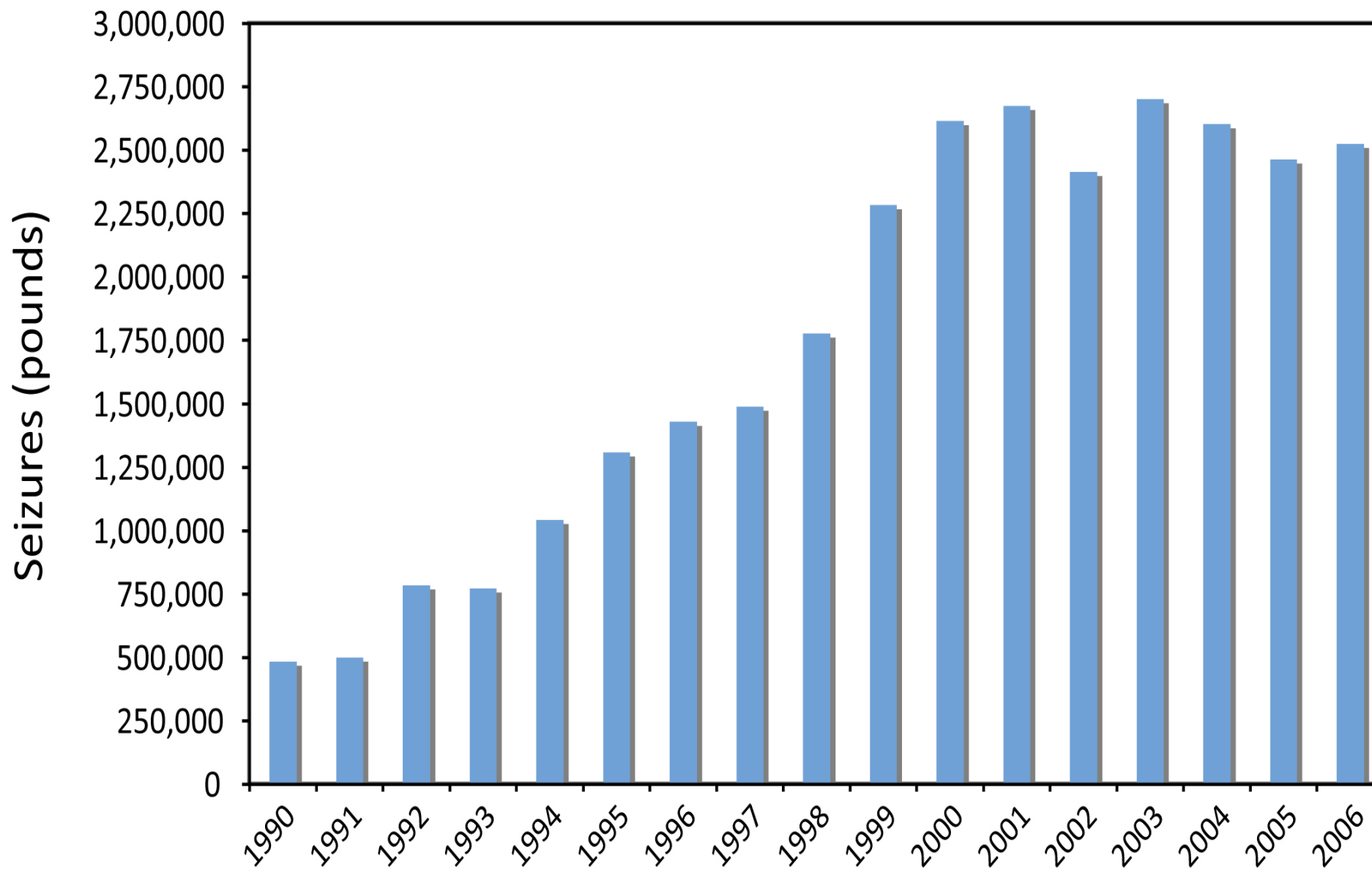


Source: US Office of National Drug Control Policy

PROHIBITION FUNDING, CANNABIS SEIZURES AND ARRESTS

- Between 1981 and 2002, the United States government spent \$217 billion (USD) on their anti-drug efforts
- Between 1990 and 2006, cannabis seizures increased by more than 400%

Figure 3. Annual Cannabis Seizures in the United States, 1990 - 2006

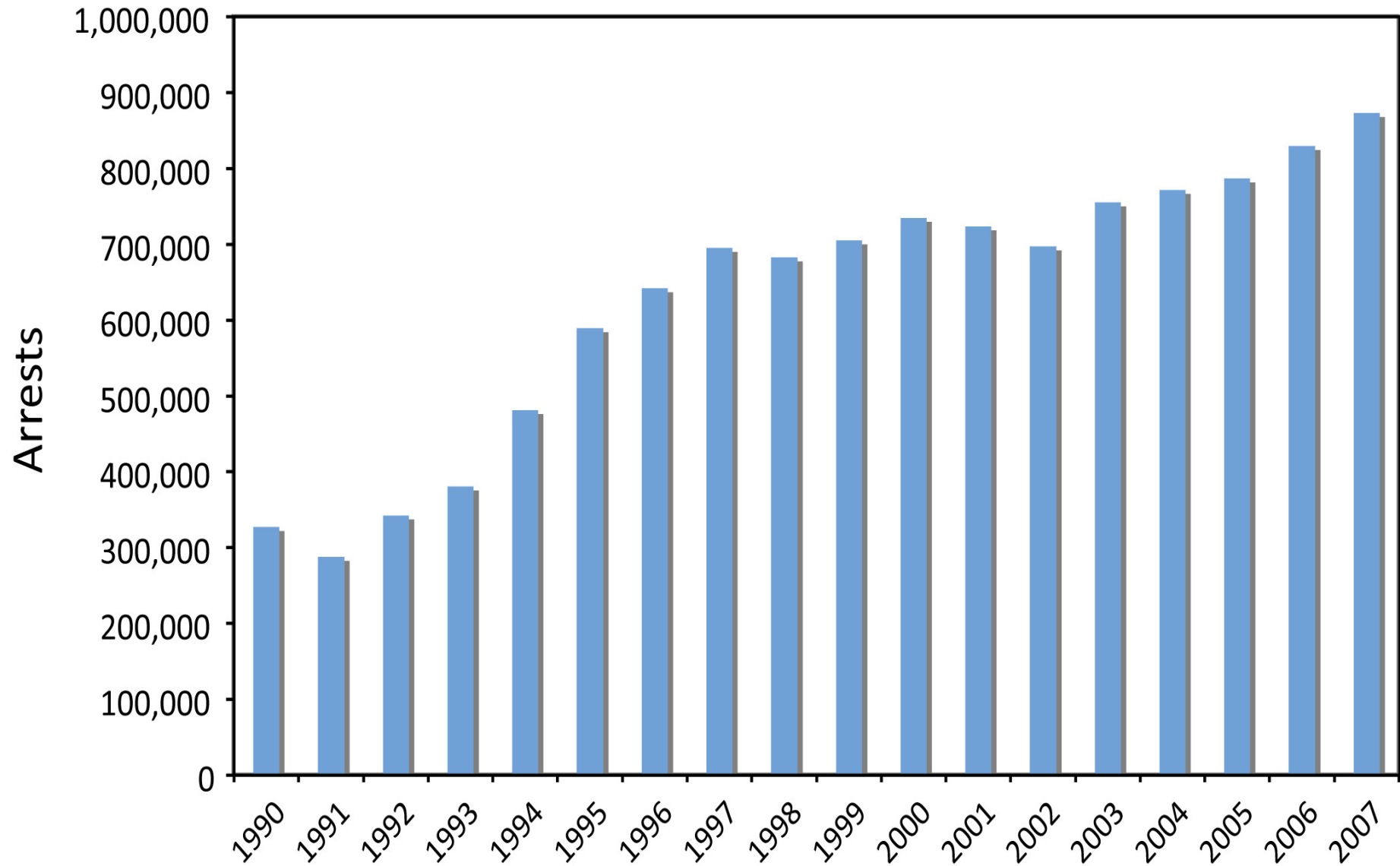


Source: US Bureau of Justice Statistics; US National Drug Threat Assessment

PROHIBITION FUNDING, CANNABIS SEIZURES AND ARRESTS

- Between 1981 and 2002, the United States government spent \$217 billion (USD) on their anti-drug efforts
- Between 1990 and 2006, cannabis seizures increased by more than 400%
- From 1990 to 2007, the number of cannabis-related arrests per year more than doubled

Figure 2. Cannabis-Related Arrests in the United States, 1990 - 2007*



*Includes arrests for possession, sale or production of cannabis

Source: US Bureau of Justice Statistics

PROHIBITION FUNDING, CANNABIS SEIZURES AND ARRESTS

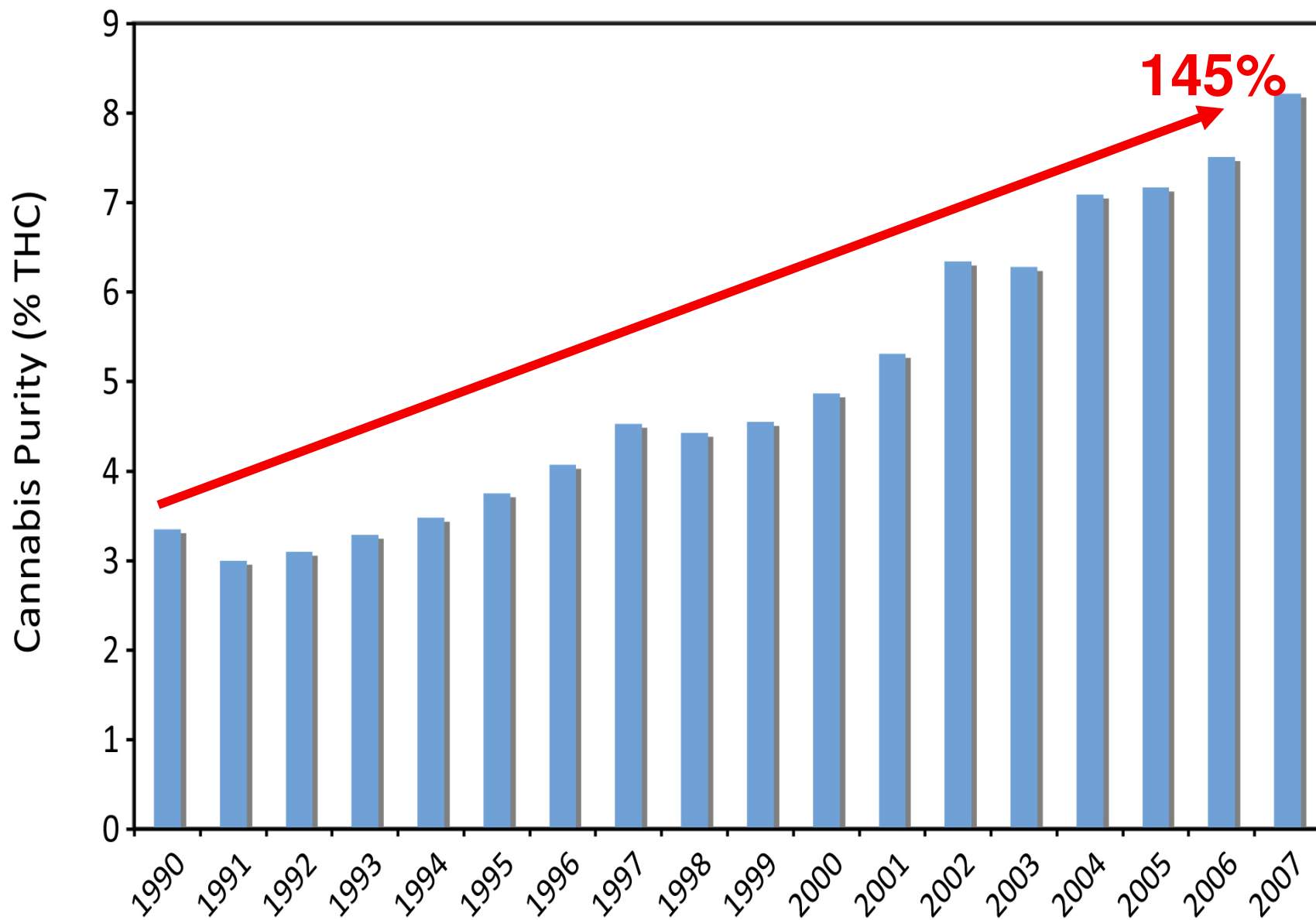
- Between 1981 and 2002, the United States government spent \$217 billion (USD) on their anti-drug efforts
- Between 1990 and 2006, cannabis seizures increased by more than 400%
- From 1990 to 2007, the number of cannabis-related arrests per year more than doubled
- The cannabis possession arrest rate for African-Americans is 300% higher than for whites, even though US government studies show African-Americans use cannabis at lower rates

**How have cannabis prohibition
expenditures, arrests and seizures
impacted cannabis-related harms?**

CANNABIS PRICE, POTENCY, USE AND AVAILABILITY

- Between 1990 and 2007, the potency of cannabis increased by 145%

Figure 4. Estimated Purity of Cannabis in the United States, 1990 - 2007

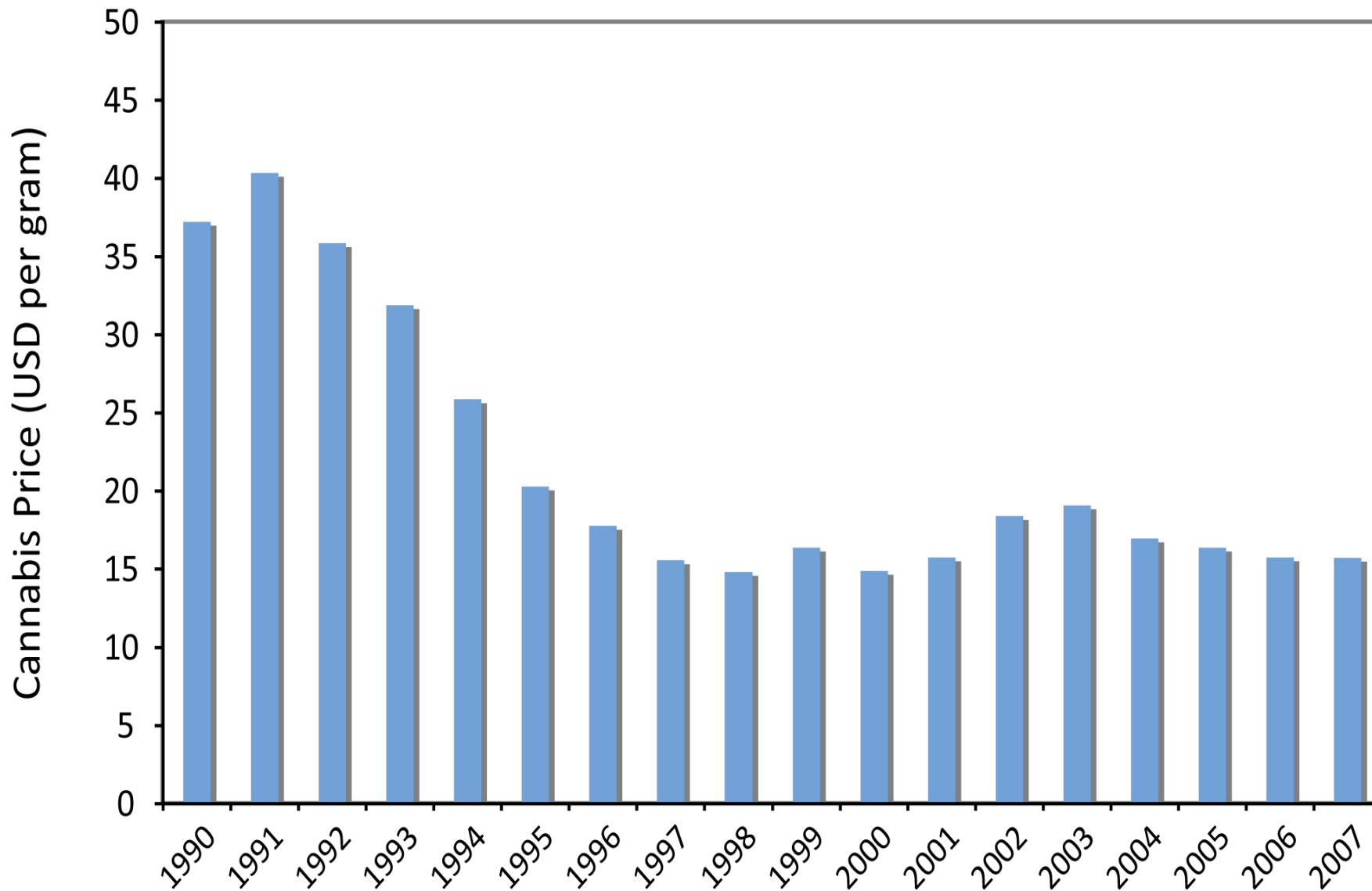


Source: University of Mississippi Cannabis Potency Monitoring Project

CANNABIS PRICE, POTENCY, USE AND AVAILABILITY

- Between 1990 and 2007, the potency of cannabis increased by 145%
- During this time, there was also a 58% reduction in the average price of cannabis

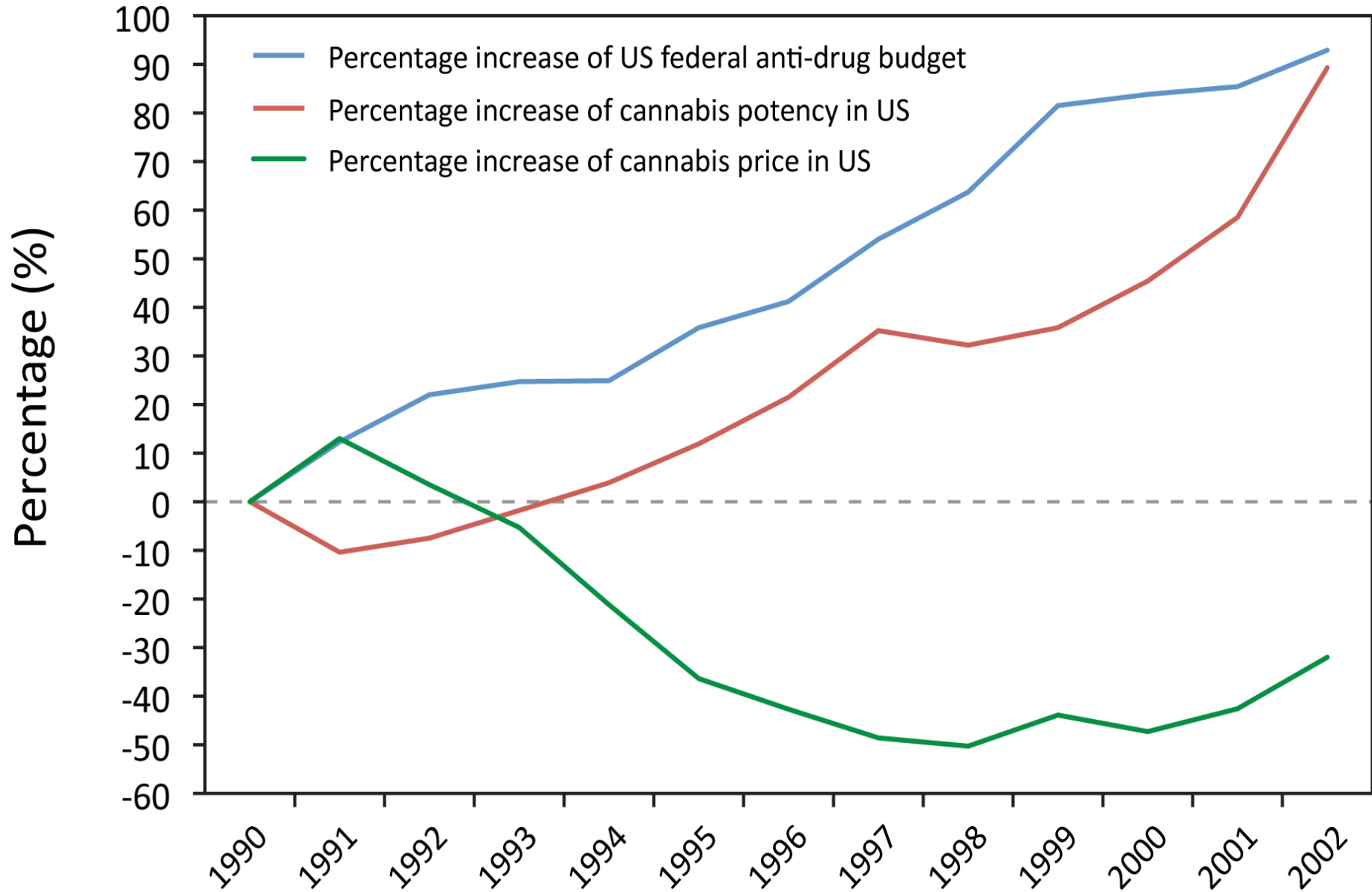
Figure 5. Estimated Price of Cannabis in the United States, 1990 - 2007



*Prices adjusted for CPI and expressed in 2007 USD

Source: US Drug Enforcement Agency STRIDE surveillance system

Percentage change of drug enforcement budget, cannabis potency and cannabis price in the United States, 1990 - 2002



CANNABIS PRICE, POTENCY, USE AND AVAILABILITY

- Between 1990 and 2007, the potency of cannabis increased by 145%
- During this time, there was also a 58% reduction in the average price of cannabis
- Yet, over the last 30 years, cannabis has remained “almost universally available to American 12th graders”
- Approximately 60% of school-aged US youth who use cannabis report having obtained their last used cannabis for free

CANNABIS USE


Rates of cannabis use among American youth do not decrease when there is increased funding for cannabis prohibition:

Annual
prevalence
of cannabis
use among
US 12 to 28
year olds

32% in 2008

28% in 1990

CANNABIS USE

- Government officials argue that rates of use would be higher if cannabis were legal
- Comparisons between the US and the Netherlands, where cannabis is de facto legalized, indicate that the US has a lifetime rate of cannabis use more than double that observed in the Netherlands 

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF CANNABIS PROHIBITION

- Making cannabis illegal enriches organized crime and drives up levels of violence as street gangs and cartels compete for drug market profits
- In Mexico, over 28,000 people have died in the drug war since 2006
- US government reports estimate that 60% of Mexican drug cartel revenue comes from cannabis

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Mexico looks to legalisation as drug war murders hit 28,000

President joins calls for debate after figures reveal extent of violence since launch of military offensive against cartels in 2006

Jo Tuckman in Mexico City
guardian.co.uk, Wednesday 4 August 2010 20.13 BST
[Article history](#)



Administration; 2005. <http://www.oas.samhsa>.

“As a nation, we have been responsible for the murder

of literally hundreds of thousands of people at home and abroad by fighting a war that should never have been started and can be won, if at all, only by converting the United States into a police state.”

Milton Friedman

US Economist and Nobel Laureate

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF A REGULATED MARKET

Table 1: Potential benefits of a regulated market for cannabis

Availability	Regulatory tools can be used in an effort to control availability. ⁵⁰
Drug market violence	By limiting the illegal cannabis market, violence arising from conflict among those involved in cannabis supply will likely be reduced. ³⁵
Organized crime	Limiting the illegal market will reduce a key source of revenue for organized crime groups. ⁵⁹
Law enforcement resources	A regulated market for cannabis creates opportunities for enforcement resources to be redeployed towards improving and maintaining community health and safety. Estimates suggest that national regulation of cannabis in the United States would result in savings of \$44.1 billion per year on enforcement expenditures alone. ³⁰
Tax revenue	Regulating cannabis could create new sources of revenue for governments. The potential new revenue for the state of California is estimated to be between approximately \$990 million and \$1.4 billion annually. ⁶⁰

EVIDENCE-BASED TOOLS FOR REGULATION

Prescription or permit system	Prescriptions or permits could be issued to individual purchasers, similar to systems in place at some medical cannabis dispensaries. ⁵⁰
Licensing system	Cannabis dispensaries could be issued conditional licences requiring compliance with regulatory guidelines. ^{46, 50}
Purchasing controls	Taxation (i.e., increasing consumer price barriers) has been shown to affect levels of alcohol and tobacco use and could be applicable to cannabis. ^{50-52, 54, 55, 61}
Sales restrictions	Implementing age restrictions, similar to tobacco and alcohol regulations, could limit access to cannabis among youth. ^{46, 51}
	Limiting days and hours of sale of alcohol has been shown to affect levels of alcohol use and could affect rates of cannabis use. ^{50, 52, 61}
	Alcohol outlet density has been associated with rates of alcohol use and hence limiting cannabis outlet density could limit rates of use. ^{52, 61}
	Restrictions on bulk sales as employed in the Netherlands, where purchases are restricted to 5 grams, could help restrict diversion to minors. ^{46, 50}

EVIDENCE-BASED TOOLS FOR REGULATION

Restrictions on use	Regulatory policies that affect the location or circumstances of use and allow for limited use in designated places, such as the Dutch coffee shop model for cannabis, could limit uncontrolled and “public nuisance” use. ^{46, 50}
	Strict regulations would prohibit driving or operating machinery while impaired. ^{46, 61}
Marketing	Strict regulations on marketing and product branding would reduce exposure to advertising, which is known to affect rates of alcohol and tobacco use. ^{46, 53}
Packaging	Tamper-proof packaging, standard labelling on content, factual health warnings, and no on-pack branding or marketing would help regulate cannabis use. ⁴⁶
Reducing harm	Regulated and controlled availability of lesser-strength substances reduces the illegal market for and use of higher potency substances, as has occurred with the regulation of alcohol. ⁵⁰
	Opportunities should be explored to change patterns of use towards non-smoked cannabis. ^{62, 63}

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**“We need at least to
consider and examine
forms of controlled
legalization of drugs.”**

George Shultz

Secretary of State under US President Ronald Reagan

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