



American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry (AAAP)

LEGALIZATION OF DRUGS

The American Academy of Psychiatrists in Alcoholism and Addictions takes a strong stand against legalization of drugs. Recently, there has been growing interest in the question of whether drugs should be legalized and whether revenues could be obtained from legalization to aid in the prevention and treatment of drug abuse. The argument goes that since interdiction is a failure and crime is increasing, legalization would remove the profit motive, reduce marketing of currently illegal substances and make new funds available for use in treatment.

The major fallacy in this argument is that increased availability will lead to increased use, abuse and addiction to illegal substances, and that no amount of increase in treatment resources will stem the tide. The number of cocaine users, currently estimated to be 6 million, could be expected to increase dramatically with legalization. No amount of increased tax revenues can compensate for the resulting massive numbers of addicted patients or the associated morbidity and mortality. In addition, major ethical and moral problems exist, with increased risk of addiction for teenagers and women of childbearing age, who are likely not only to suffer greatly from addictive disorders but also to have babies with fetal cocaine or heroin-related problems. There is no rational plan for distribution of these drugs that would not be hazardous and full of ethical problems.

Legalization also poses a hazard for psychiatric patients who are likely to suffer further psychiatric complications with the additional threat of addiction to a psychoactive substance of abuse. Legalization of marijuana would further the likelihood of its becoming a gateway drug to other substances of abuse, as well as increasing marijuana-related morbidity.

Though against legalization, AAAP is in favor of maximizing treatment and prevention efforts that do not stigmatize addicted patients, and significantly reduce crime. We also suggest increasing research on addictions in general and on the effects of social policies.

Approved by AAAP Board of Directors: September 1990

This statement by the American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry is not intended to serve as a standard of medical care or treatment, nor does it necessarily reflect the views of individual AAAP members. This statement is not intended for use in making judgments about appropriate methods of care, treatment, or procedures, medical malpractice, disability determination, competency, or any other medical or legal matters.