

# MEDICAL MARIJUANA ACT: SELECTED STATISTICS FROM COLORADO AND WASHINGTON

## Background

As part of its monitoring of the Montana Medical Marijuana Act, the Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee expressed interest in seeing how drug arrests and drug usage among youth have changed in Colorado and Washington since those two states legalized the recreational use of marijuana.

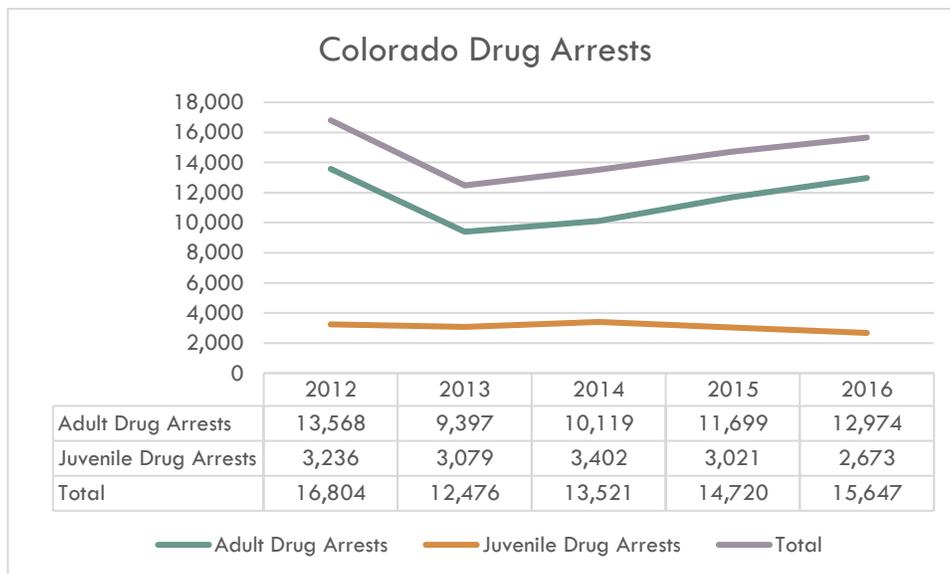
Voters in both states approved ballot measures in November 2012 that allowed nearly immediate use and possession of marijuana by people who were 21 years of age or older. Retail sales were allowed in both states starting in 2014.

This briefing paper summarizes crime statistics from the two states over a five-year period and also looks at surveys involving youth drug use.

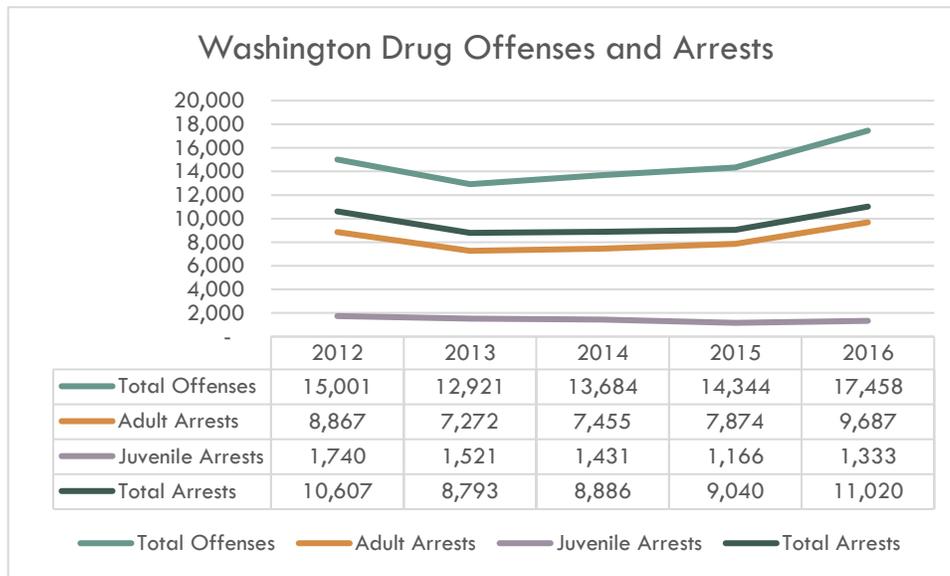
## Drug Arrests in Colorado and Washington

Both Colorado and Washington collect data on a specified set of crimes and submit the information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation as part of a national uniform crime-reporting system.

The graphs below show the number of drug arrests for adults and juveniles in each state from 2012, before marijuana was legalized, through 2016.



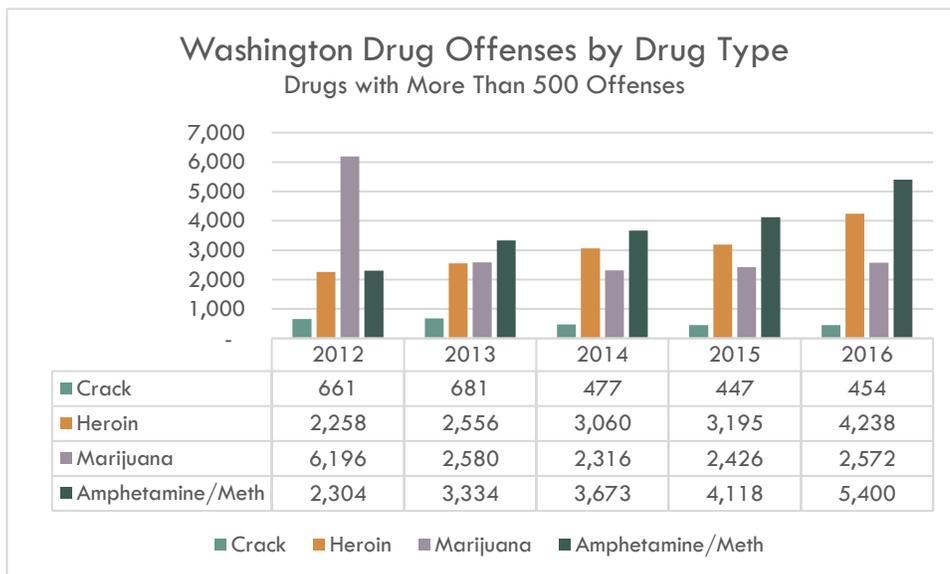
Source: Crime in Colorado reports, 2012 through 2016



Source: Crime in Washington reports, 2012 through 2016

Colorado does not break its drug statistics down by the type of drug involved. However, statistics for Washington show that marijuana offenses dropped significantly in 2013, when it was legal for adults to possess small amounts of marijuana. Marijuana offenses have held fairly steady in the subsequent years.

The graph below shows the drugs most frequently involved in Washington state's reported drug offenses.



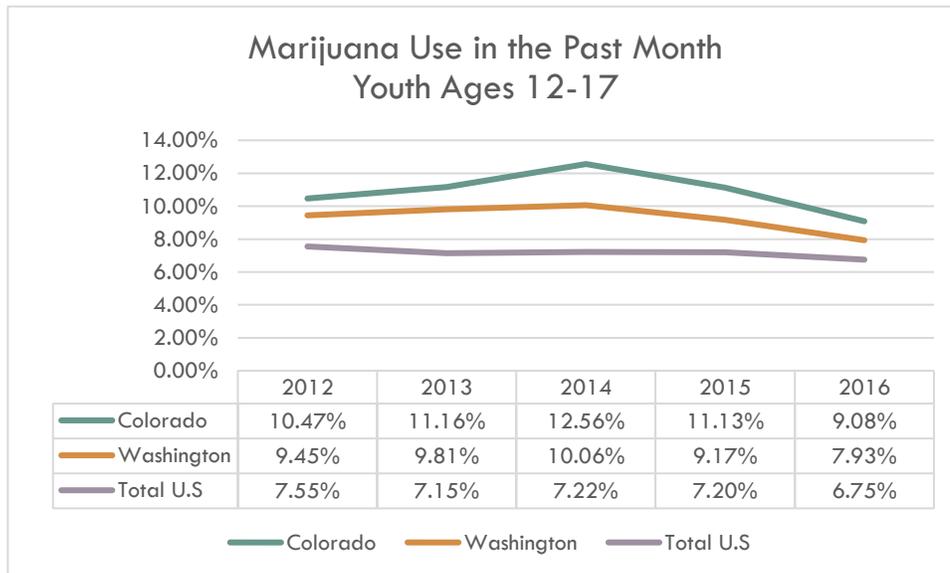
Source: Crime in Washington reports, 2012 through 2016

## Youth Drug Usage

Two nationally recognized surveys attempt to measure drug use among youth. The National Survey of Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is conducted in each state every year. In addition, states generally survey middle school and high school youth every two years on behavioral risks and other health-related topics.

### NSDUH Data

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration conducts the NSDUH each year to determine substance use, abuse, and dependence among Americans 12 years of age and older. The chart below shows the percentage of youth 12 to 17 years of age in Colorado, Washington, and nationwide who reported using marijuana in the past month.



Source: National Survey of Drug Use and Health

### Youth Risk Behavior Surveys

Colorado conducts the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey every two years with randomly selected schools that agree to participate in the survey. Students have the option of participating in the survey, which asks a wide range of health-related questions.

Recent surveys show little change in marijuana use among high school students. In 2011, before legalization, 22% of high school respondents reported using marijuana in the past month. In 2013, 20% of respondents reported recent use, while 21% did so in 2015.

In Washington, students can fill out a similar survey known as the Healthy Youth Survey. In recent surveys, the following percentages of youth reported using marijuana in the past month:

- Eighth grade: 9% in 2012, 7% in 2014, and 6% in 2016.
- Tenth grade: 19% in 2012, 18% in 2014, and 17% in 2016.
- Twelfth grade: 27% in 2012, 27% in 2014, and 26% in 2016.