



CLAIM	RESPONSE
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**Regulation leads to a “Big Marijuana” scenario.**

- The emergence of regulated recreational cannabis markets has been accompanied with claims that these policy changes will lead to large, for-profit cannabis industries with little oversight and a lack of concern about public health and safety, sometimes referred to as a “Big Marijuana” scenario. In addition to being unsupported by scientific evidence and based on speculation, this claim implies a weaker level of government control than is possible under cannabis regulation.
- Concerns that regulation will lead to a massive commercialized industry are rooted in the assumption that cannabis will follow a similar trajectory as tobacco (T. Hughes, 2015). In previous decades in North America, the tobacco industry engaged in heavy advertising (especially to youth) and industry deception about the health risks associated with use. As a result, tobacco use increased and became a major source of preventable health conditions and mortality (Richter & Levy, 2014). Assuming that the cannabis industry will follow in the footsteps of tobacco is, however, mere speculation and is not supported by scientific evidence. It is equally, if not more, likely that given the previous experience with tobacco, governments will take greater steps towards ensuring that regulations foster a responsible cannabis industry.
- A “Big Marijuana” scenario is in no way an inevitable consequence of a regulated recreational cannabis market. By allowing governments to control the conditions under which cannabis is sold, regulatory models that avoid such an outcome can be employed. This could entail limits on the size of individual market players, or the use of a state monopoly. Restrictions on advertising, requirements for product labelling on health harms, and investments in public education are regulatory controls that do not foster a large commercialized industry and can be adopted.
- It is still too early to determine whether recently regulated cannabis markets in Colorado, Washington State, and Uruguay will experience a “Big Marijuana” scenario. However, these jurisdictions have employed stricter regulatory controls than those used for tobacco in previous decades, including restrictions on retail quantities and advertising and promotion (Gutierrez & Pardo, 2015; Pardo, 2014). Uruguay, for example, has prohibited cannabis advertising (Gutierrez & Pardo, 2015; Pardo, 2014). The use of strict regulatory controls like these diminishes the likelihood of a “Big Marijuana” scenario.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Available evidence regarding “Big Marijuana” is currently lacking, though regulatory controls can be introduced within regulatory systems to reduce the potential of profit maximization by cannabis retailers.

**REFERENCES:**  
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