



CLAIM **RESPONSE**

“I’m opposed to legalizing marijuana because it acts as a gateway drug.”

- Enrique Peña Nieto,
President of Mexico
(Khazan, 2013)

- Scientific evidence suggests that cannabis use often precedes the use of “harder” illicit drugs, such as cocaine and heroin (W. Hall, 2014). However, there is no evidence to suggest that the use of cannabis causes or increases the risk that an individual will move on to use other drugs.
- Scientists have explored alternative explanations for why cannabis use tends to take place before the use of “harder” substances. For instance, people who use cannabis may be more likely to use other drugs because they have entered an illicit drug market that features cannabis alongside other drugs, or because of personality traits (e.g., sensation seeking, impulsivity) that make them more likely to try drugs in general (W. D. Hall & Lynskey, 2005). Regardless of the reason, studies have not been able to convincingly remove these and other possible major explanations and thereby prove that cannabis acts as a “gateway” drug.
- Interestingly, in some countries, use of alcohol and tobacco use has been shown to be more strongly linked than cannabis to the later use of other illicit drugs (Degenhardt et al., 2010).

BOTTOM LINE: Evidence to date does not support the claim that cannabis use causes subsequent use of “harder” drugs.

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