

Eleven Insights from Eleven Years of Legal Cannabis for Nonmedical Purposes

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Whereas the 20th century could be largely characterized as the age of cannabis prohibition, the 21st century may ultimately be known as the era of cannabis legalization. Although several countries and subnational jurisdictions have relaxed laws to allow cannabis to be used for medical purposes, the policy landscape shifted dramatically in 2012 when voters in the U.S. states of Colorado and Washington passed ballot initiatives to allow cannabis to be produced and sold to adults for nonmedical purposes. As of September 2023, nearly half of the U.S. population (more than 165 million people) live in states that have passed laws allowing commercial production and for-profit retail sales. But this is hardly a U.S. phenomenon. The Australian Capital Territory, Canada, Luxembourg, Malta, and Uruguay have passed laws allowing some form(s) of legal cannabis supply for adult use. In addition, some countries are now implementing pilot programs for legal supply (e.g., the Netherlands, Switzerland) and others are seriously debating the merits of changing their cannabis laws (e.g., Colombia, Czech Republic, Germany). This commentary offers eleven insights from the first eleven years of legal cannabis for nonmedical purposes, with the goal of informing policy discussions in places considering, implementing, or revising their approach to cannabis legalization.