



FOCUS  
For Our Community Unity & Support  
Addiction Prevention Coalition

Key Informant Interview Report

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Prepared by:



Catalyst Research, LLC

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## I. Executive Summary

In summer and fall 2020, FOCUS developed a series of key informant interview questions and conducted seven interviews with key individuals representing different sectors of the Lancaster/Depew community. FOCUS engaged in this assessment and capacity building exercise to better understand current community issues and make decisions about appropriate strategies and activities for intervention.

This round of FOCUS key informant interviews dealt with the growing issue of marijuana use. As marijuana becomes more accepted in society (through medicalization, decriminalization, and/or legalization), and as marijuana becomes more accessible to individuals as a result of these societal changes, there is a need for communities to understand how marijuana use affects youth and do their best to prevent youth from using marijuana.

As such, FOCUS worked with their external evaluator to develop five questions about marijuana use. The topics of these questions include how youth under 18 view marijuana use in general; how adults over 18 view marijuana use in general; how adults over 18 feel their own marijuana use affects their health; how youth views of marijuana use change over time; and how well community members understand the differences between THC and CBD, active chemicals in marijuana.

### Key Findings

- **Low perceived risk of marijuana use** was the dominant theme throughout all interview responses. Thirty percent of all coded responses fell within the theme of low perceived risk of marijuana use by both youth and adults in the Lancaster/Depew community. This dovetails with results from the 2019 Prevention Needs Assessment Survey, where just 60.3% of students associated regular marijuana use with a “moderate” or “great deal” of risk to health.
- **Changing social norms about marijuana use** was the second most prevalent theme throughout interview responses. Twenty-six percent of all coded responses fell into the theme of changing social norms, with respondents frequently citing the medicalization of marijuana, impending legalization, exposure to pro-marijuana media, and reduced stigma of marijuana use as contributors to changes in marijuana attitudes and behaviors among youth.
- **Parental attitudes favorable to marijuana use** and **social access to marijuana** were also frequently cited by respondents. These issues often go hand-in-hand, as respondents indicated that parents smoke marijuana with their kids; parents see marijuana as the “lesser of evils” as compared to other drugs; and parents rationalize their own use by deeming marijuana harmless – even if used by youth.

The data presented in this report may be used in concert with other data FOCUS has collected to provide the best prevention activities and services to the Lancaster/Depew community. For more on suggested ways to use the data in this report, please see *Section IV. Findings and Recommendations*.

## II. Methodology

FOCUS implemented the Prevention Needs Assessment (PNA) Survey in the Lancaster and Depew School Districts in 2019. Nearly 1,400 students responded; the administration provided invaluable quantitative data on the behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs of the community's youth.

Quantitative surveys like the PNA yield a wealth of data. However, analyzing survey results alone may lead to an improper assessment of youth needs. Instead, coalitions like FOCUS must use additional data to triangulate issues – one data source is the key informant interview<sup>1</sup>.

In summer and fall 2020, FOCUS staff worked with their external evaluator to create a key informant interview protocol with the goal of better understanding youth behaviors and attitudes related to marijuana use. PNA data showed trends favorable toward marijuana use (e.g., just 42.6% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders across both districts believe weekly marijuana use is of moderate or great harm to their health); as such, FOCUS leaders decided to interview key informants about why attitudes and behaviors about marijuana appear to be changing among youth.

The FOCUS evaluation team created five interview questions related to marijuana use in the community. Each question contained two follow-up questions. Additionally, the team prepared an overall protocol containing definitions for key terms, ground rules for administration, and potential probes for the interviewer. Finally, the team identified seven key informants across several community sectors, including parents, youth, law enforcement, and schools.

The five main questions posed to respondents were:

1. How is marijuana use viewed by youth under age 18 in your community?
2. How is marijuana use viewed by adults over age 18 in your community?
3. In what ways do parents in the community think their own marijuana use affects their health?
4. How do attitudes towards marijuana use change as youth get older?
5. How much do youth know about the differences between CBD and THC?

The full interview protocol may be found in *Section V. Appendices*.

Coalition Coordinator John Brusio conducted the interviews in August and September 2020. Each interview lasted approximately 30-40 minutes; Mr. Brusio recorded the sessions with participant permission and also took notes as necessary.

After interviews were complete, the FOCUS evaluation team met to create a shared coding convention for identifying and tabulating themes in the data.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cadca.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/communityvoicequalitivedata.pdf>

### III. Results

The data collected through the key informant interview process were analyzed using a four-step process. First, the FOCUS evaluation team each coded the same interview and identified themes resulting from the data. After this, the team convened to discuss commonalities and discrepancies in coding. From this discussion, a list of coding conventions was developed to ensure inter-rater reliability. Finally, FOCUS’s external evaluator coded and tabulated the data following the conventions developed by the coalition.

In this section, results for each interview question are presented, including major themes and key respondent quotes.

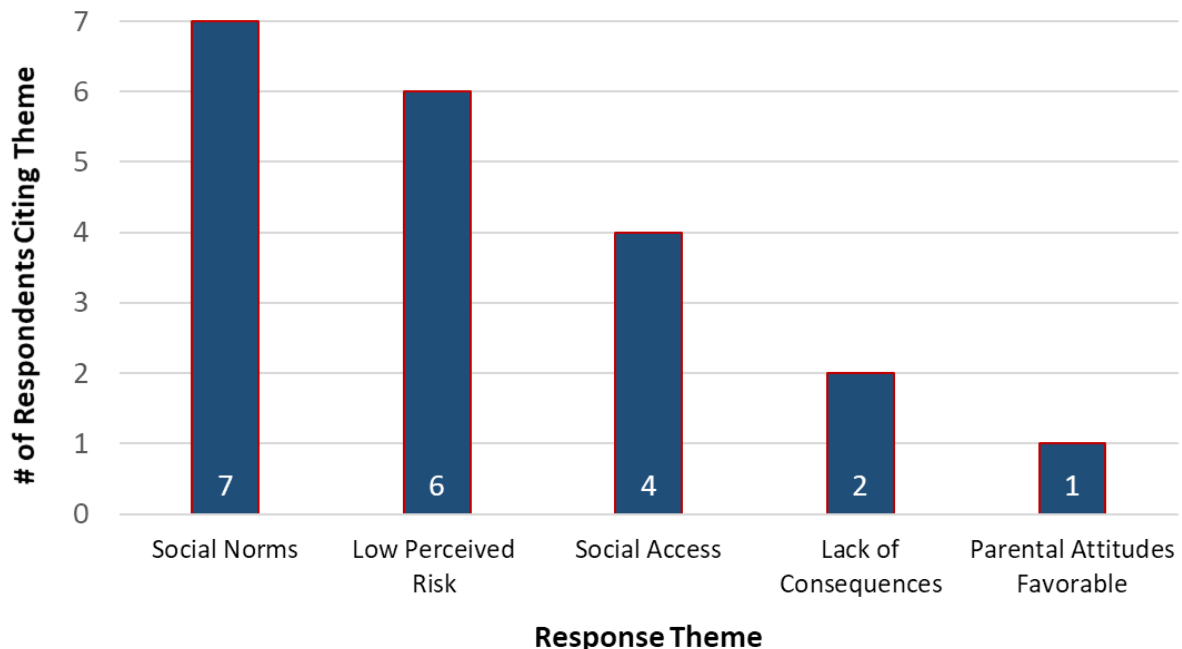
#### Question 1: How is marijuana use viewed by youth under age 18 in your community?

##### Number of Respondents = 7

Respondents were asked about how youth view marijuana use in the community, especially in light of concerning increases in marijuana prevalence, increased access to marijuana, and decreases in perceptions of harm of marijuana use.

As shown in the below chart, respondents had many thoughts about how marijuana use is viewed by youth in the community and why youth have these views. The theme of social norms – changing views about the acceptability of use, legalization of use, medicalization of marijuana, etc. – was mentioned as a leading factor in youth views by all respondents. Additionally, respondents indicated that youth have a low perceived risk of marijuana use, which supports the findings of the 2019 PNA.

Figure 1. Theme Summary, Question 1 of Key Informant Interview



Examples of responses by theme are below:

#### Social Norms

- It's going to be legal soon anyway (common response across participants)
- It can be used for medical reasons (common response across participants)
- Marijuana/THC has replaced alcohol as the way to get high
- Kids use marijuana to fit into the new norm of marijuana as a "drug of choice"
- Society as a whole now accepts marijuana

#### Low Perceived Risk

- "Not a big deal" (common response across participants)
- Marijuana is not as concerning as other drugs (common response across participants)
- No sense of fear or danger associated with use
- Lack of community education about the negative effects of marijuana use

#### Social Access

- Marijuana is commonly available at parties
- Marijuana and alcohol use often go hand-in-hand due to ease of access

#### Lack of Consequences

- Youth feel that marijuana use is harder to detect than use of other drugs
- Youth feel that they will not be caught using marijuana and/or charged with a crime

#### Parental Attitudes Favorable

- Marijuana use is a common practice across the community, including among adults

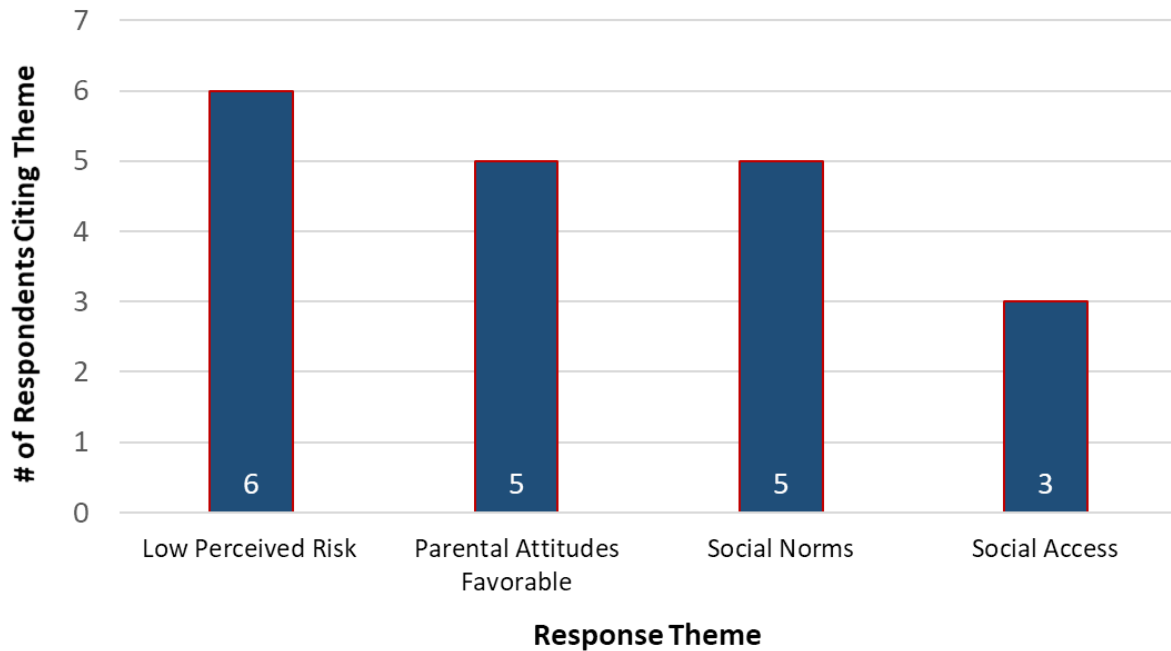
### **Question 2: How is marijuana use viewed by adults over age 18 in your community?**

#### **Number of Respondents = 7**

Respondents were asked this question to better understand how other adults in the community view marijuana use, again in light of concerning increases in marijuana prevalence, increased access to marijuana, and decreases in perceptions of harm of marijuana use.

As shown in the below chart, respondents expressed a range of thoughts about how marijuana use is viewed by adults in the community and why adults have these views. As with Question 1, similar themes appeared – low perceived risk of marijuana use, parental attitudes favorable to marijuana use, changing social norms regarding marijuana use, and access to marijuana.

Figure 2. Theme Summary, Question 2 of Key Informant Interview



Examples of responses by theme are below:

Low Perceived Risk

- Marijuana is not as concerning as other drugs (common response across participants)
- “Not a big deal” (common response across participants)
- Adults convince themselves that marijuana is not harmful in order to justify use

Parental Attitudes Favorable

- Parents impart favorable attitudes about marijuana by smoking with and/or around their kids
- Adults are just not concerned about marijuana

Social Norms

- It’s going to be legal soon anyway (common response across participants)
- It can be used for medical reasons (common response across participants)
- Adults care less about marijuana use now than 20 years ago

Social Access

- Parents smoke marijuana with their kids

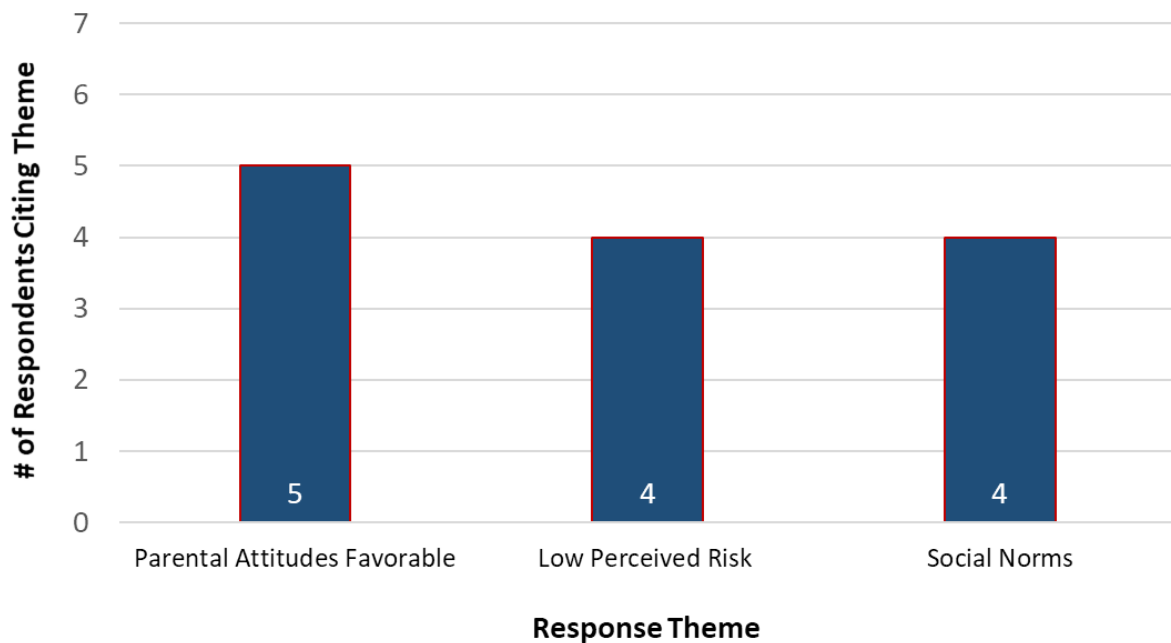
**Question 3: In what ways do parents in the community think their own marijuana use affects their health?**

**Number of Respondents = 7**

Respondents were asked this question to better understand how adults in the community see personal marijuana use affecting their own health. The responses to this question help to provide context about how and why there are increases in youth marijuana use in the community.

The feedback for this question centered on three themes – parental attitudes favorable to marijuana use, low perceived risk of marijuana use, and changing social norms about marijuana use.

Figure 3. Theme Summary, Question 3 of Key Informant Interview



Examples of responses by theme are below:

Parental Attitudes Favorable

- Parents use marijuana to self-medicate (common response across participants)
- Parents believe their use will not affect attitudes/behaviors of their kids

Low Perceived Risk

- Adults feel marijuana use poses a low risk to their health (common response across participants)
- Adults convince themselves that marijuana is not harmful in order to justify use

Social Norms

- It's going to be legal soon anyway (common response across participants)
- It can be used for medical reasons (common response across participants)

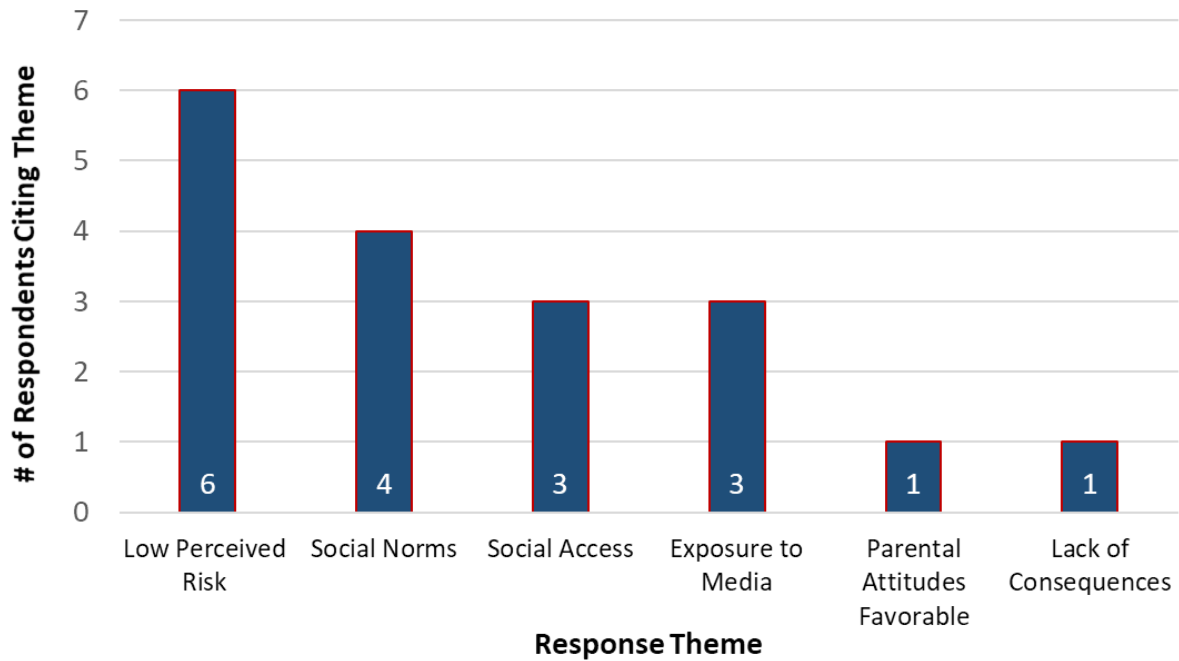


**Question 4: How do attitudes towards marijuana use change as youth get older?**

**Number of Respondents = 7**

Respondents were asked this question to better understand how youth attitudes toward marijuana change over time. The responses to this question will help FOCUS understand how and why community youth marijuana use increases as students get older.

Figure 4. Theme Summary, Question 4 of Key Informant Interview



Examples of responses by theme are below:

Low Perceived Risk

- Youth perceptions of harm of marijuana use decrease as kids get older (common response across participants)
- “It’s not a big deal” (common response across participants)
- As youth get older, those around them have more relaxed views toward marijuana

Social Norms

- Peer pressure increases as youth grow older (common response across participants)
- Social stigma of marijuana use is decreasing
- Decriminalization and legalization are affecting attitudes among older youth

Social Access

- Social access increases as youth get older (siblings, parents, friends, internet, etc.)

Exposure to Media

- Prevalence of advertising on social media and the internet in general makes marijuana use feel safe (common response across participants)

Parental Attitudes Favorable

- As youth get older, parents relax their attitudes toward marijuana use, creating a “never-ending cycle” of use

Lack of Consequences

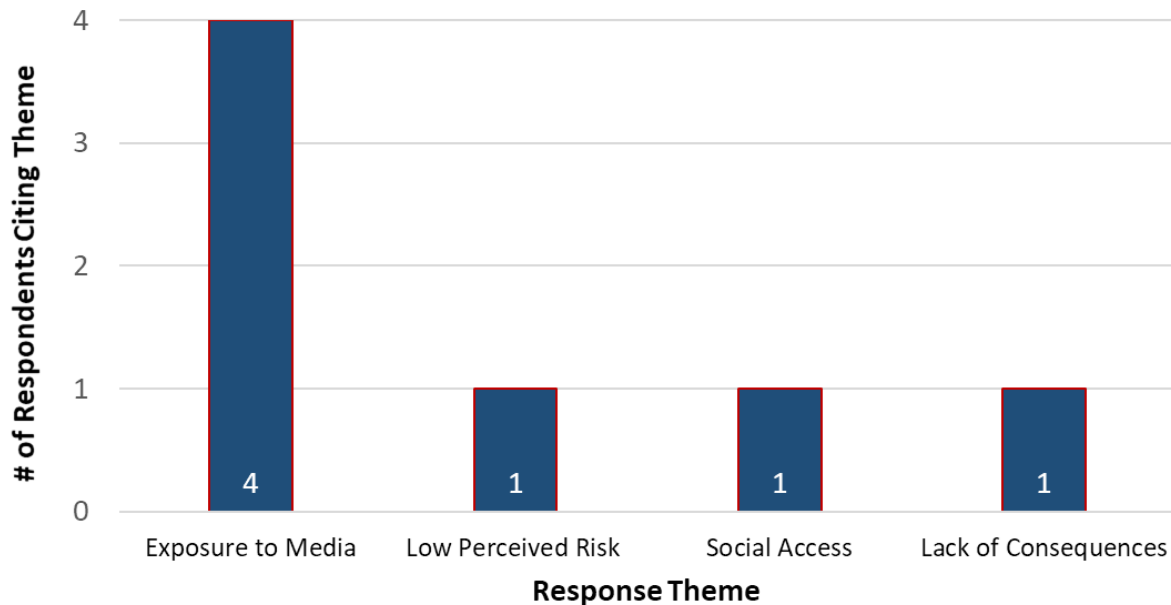
- Older youth find it easier to conceal marijuana and marijuana use as opposed to other drugs

**Question 5: How much do youth know about the differences between CBD and THC?**

**Number of Respondents = 4**

Respondents were asked this question to better understand how much community members know about CBD, THC, and the differences between the two. The responses to this question will guide FOCUS on educational topics for youth, adults, and the general community. Due to time restrictions, six of seven respondents had the opportunity to respond to this question. Additionally, two respondents indicated having no knowledge about CBD or THC.

Figure 5. Theme Summary, Question 5 of Key Informant Interview



Exposure to Media

- Social media – including TikTok, Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter – provide information on both CBD and THC (common response across participants)

Low Perceived Risk

- Youth feel that CBD is natural and therefore poses no risk

Social Access

- Youth have access to both CBD and marijuana and may use CBD expecting to get high

Lack of Consequences

- Youth feel there would not be consequences if caught with either CBD or THC

## IV. Findings and Recommendations

### Findings

Several themes were found throughout all responses to the questions asked during the key informant interviews. These themes align not only with national findings on marijuana use<sup>2</sup> but also with findings from the 2019 Prevention Needs Assessment (PNA) Survey administered in the Lancaster and Depew School Districts.

Theme 1: Low Perceived Risk – Thirty percent of all coded themes related to the low perception of risk youth have in terms of marijuana use and negative health impacts. This theme supports findings in the 2019 PNA that showed perception of risk of using marijuana decrease from 73.9% in Grade 8 to 42.6% in Grade 12.

Theme 2: Social Norms – Twenty-six percent of all cited themes related to changing social norms about marijuana use. The medicalization of marijuana plays a large part in the changing norms, but decriminalization and legalization of marijuana are also major factors. Many respondents referred to decreased stigma of marijuana use in society.

Theme 3: Parental Attitudes Favorable to Marijuana Use – Sixteen percent of all cited themes related to favorable parental attitudes toward marijuana use in the community. Specifically, there were many references to parents' use of marijuana as a way to self-medicate; this, in turn, can have serious consequences on the way youth view marijuana use.

Theme 4: Social Access – Fourteen percent of all cited themes related to the ability of community residents to get marijuana. This access runs from parents smoking with their youth to youth buying marijuana on social media. As access increases and perception of risk decreases, use increases.

In sum, the data collected through this interview process support the findings of the 2019 PNA and other local data collected by FOCUS. The effort to prevent marijuana use among youth needs to be a community-wide one, with all sectors of the community coming together to effect population-level change in norms and behaviors in the Lancaster/Depew community.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.samhsa.gov/marijuana/resources>

## Recommendations

The findings in this report, coupled with findings from the Prevention Needs Assessment Survey and other archival assessment data, show that there is a strong need in the Lancaster/Depew community for education about marijuana and the dangers of youth marijuana use. Some recommendations for next steps include:

1. Providing education on the risks of marijuana use – It is recommended that FOCUS implement a series of strategies and activities to educate community members on the harmful effects marijuana use has on the developing youth brain. The research on this subject is growing, but early conclusions are clear – youth marijuana use limits and/or changes brain development.<sup>3</sup>
2. Working to counter messaging in mass media – Youth are affected by media, and advertisers have more ways to target specific audiences than ever before. Add to this the importance that social media sites have to youth, and advertisers have a captive audience vulnerable to effective advertising about marijuana. As a coalition, FOCUS may counter this messaging through local social norming efforts and social marketing campaigns.
3. Working to educate parents – Regardless of a parent’s beliefs about their own use of marijuana, it is important to note that youth brains are still developing and, therefore, much more at risk of negative long-term effects from marijuana use. As such, it is recommended that FOCUS engages parents as often as possible to change community norms related to marijuana use.
4. Work to understand and reduce social access – Coalitions like FOCUS must stay up to date on changes in youth behaviors and attitudes. In this case, this means understanding how youth are accessing marijuana and working to limit this access. Some recommended actions include ad buys on social media, community education on the dangers of sharing marijuana with youth, and targeted education for school and law enforcement members on the ways to recognize and prevent marijuana use.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/what-are-marijuanas-long-term-effects-brain>

## V. Appendices

### FOCUS Key Informant Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I asked to talk with you because you are a key Lancaster/Depew community leader who works with youth on a regular basis. Over the next hour, I would like to gather your feedback on youth attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding marijuana. Your feedback will be kept confidential and anonymous, and it will be used only for substance use prevention planning for youth in the Lancaster/Depew community.

Before we begin, I would like to define a few terms that will be used in the interview questions:

Community – The Lancaster and Depew school districts

Favorably – Acceptable or OK

Unfavorably – Unacceptable or not OK

Mental Health – Psychological and emotional well-being

Contributes – Help to cause or bring about

Attitudes – A way of thinking that is often reflected in behavior

CBD – Cannabidiol, a non-psychoactive compound found in marijuana

THC – Tetrahydrocannabinol, a psychoactive compound found in marijuana

1. How is marijuana use viewed by youth under age 18 in your community?

Follow-up 1: What do you think contributes to youth viewing marijuana use favorably?

Follow-up 2: What do you think contributes to youth viewing marijuana use unfavorably?

2. How is marijuana use viewed by adults over age 18 in your community?

Follow-up 1: What do you think contributes to adults viewing marijuana use favorably?

Follow-up 2: What do you think contributes to adults viewing marijuana use unfavorably?

3. In what ways do parents in the community think their own marijuana use affects their health?

Follow-up 1: What about mental health effects in particular?

Follow-up 2: What about physical health effects in particular?

Potential probes: We've discussed some short-term ways that use affects health...what do you think use does in the long term? (for both mental and physical health)

4. How do attitudes towards marijuana use change as youth get older?

Follow-up 1: What do you think contributes to changing views on marijuana use?

Follow-up 2: Where do you think youth get information that may change their views on marijuana use?

Potential probes: Can you give us a specific example of how x can influence youth views on marijuana use as they get older?

5. How much do youth know about the differences between CBD and THC?

Follow-up 1: Where do you think youth get their knowledge about CBD and THC?

Follow-up 2: Do youth think that CBD can get them "high"? Why or why not?