

# State Legal Status and Perceptions of Consequences of Cannabis Among Users and Nonusers

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## INTRODUCTION

- As more states legalize cannabis for medical and recreational use, it is important to understand changing attitudes about the benefits and risks of use.
- Perception of cannabis use as risky has decreased, the percentage of U.S. adults favoring legalization of recreational use has increased (Carliner et al., 2017).
- Research Question: Do perceptions of risks and benefits of cannabis use vary by U.S. state legal status?
- We hypothesized that current users and those who reside in legal recreational states would perceive more benefits and fewer risks of use.

## METHODS

### Participants & Method

- Adult cannabis users (N=254) and nonusers (n=235) from a U.S. national online research panel. Data were collected in April 2020.
- 60.9% female, 82% White non-Hispanic, 10% Hispanic/Latinx across all races; mean age 41.66 years ( $SD = 15.92$ ; 18-82).
- Among current users (i.e., past year use), 61% reported using at least weekly.

### Measures

- **Perceptions of Risks and Benefits of Cannabis Use.** Participants viewed a list of 38 potential benefits and risks of cannabis use and indicated the extent to which they agreed with each (1=*extremely disagree*; 7=*extremely agree*). Responses were averaged to create separate perceived risk ( $\alpha=.92$ ,  $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) and perceived benefit ( $\alpha=.93$ ,  $M = 4.62$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) scores.
  - **Risk examples:** lead to addiction, decrease motivation, cause breathing problems (18 items)
  - **Benefit examples:** reduce depression, improve sleep, relieve pain (20 items)
- **Cannabis Use Disorder Identification Test-Revised (Adamson et al., 2010)** assessed cannabis related problems among current users ( $\alpha=.86$ ;  $M = 10.80$ ,  $SD = 7.94$ )
- **State recreational status** was identified by National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (norml.com; as of April 2020)

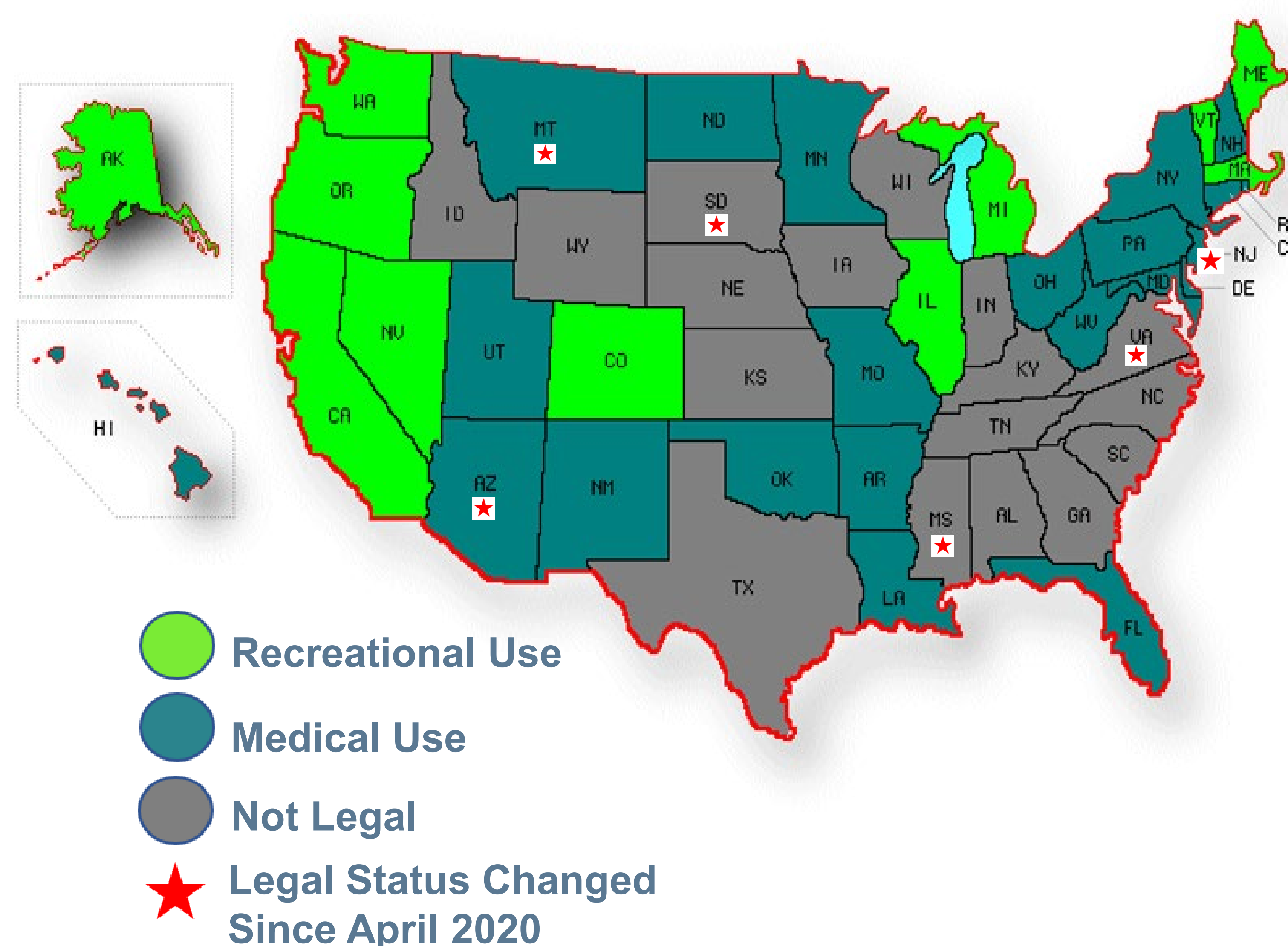
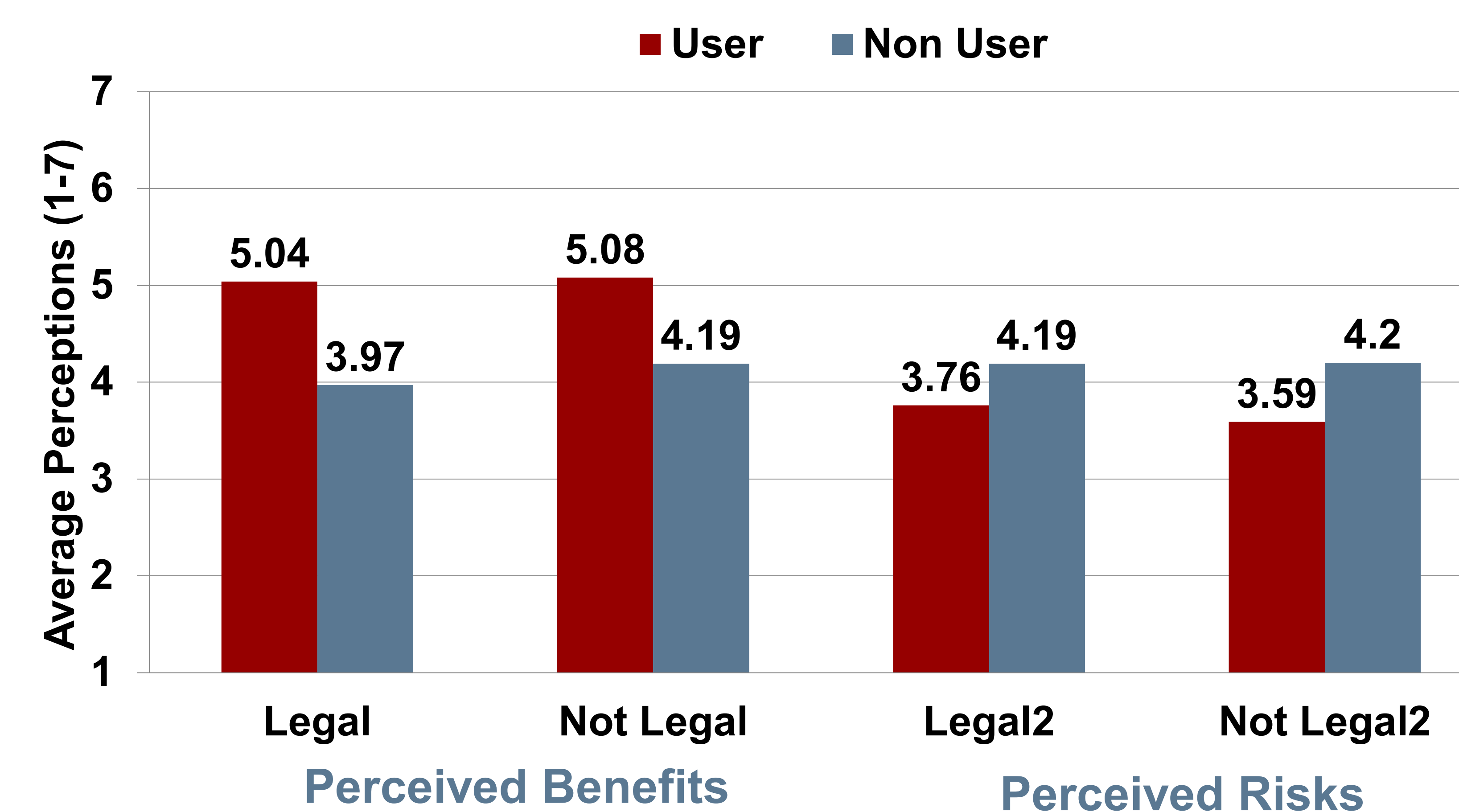


Figure 1. Cannabis Legality by State at Time of Data Collection

## RESULTS

- A 2 (user status) X 2 (legal recreational status) ANOVA indicated a main effect of user status. Current users endorsed more benefits ( $d=1.01$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and fewer risks ( $d=.53$ ,  $p<.001$ ) of user status relative to nonusers.
- Perceptions of risks and benefits did not vary by recreational legal status, nor were there significant use status X legal status interactions.
- Among current users, cannabis use frequency in the past year and past 30 days were associated with problems ( $r_s = .72$ ,  $.39$ ;  $p_s<.001$ ), but state legal status did not moderate these relationships.

Figure 2. Current User Status X Legal Recreational Status on Perceptions of Cannabis Risks and Benefit



## CONCLUSIONS

- Perceptions of the risks or benefits of cannabis did not vary by U.S. state recreational legal status.
- Perceived benefits and risks of cannabis may precede changes in legal policy.
- These results may have implications for policymakers and voters in states that have not yet legalized cannabis for medical and recreational purposes.