

# Marijuana Fact Sheet

Marijuana is the most commonly abused illicit drug in the United States. It is a dry, shredded green and brown mix of flowers, stems, seeds, and leaves derived from the hemp plant *Cannabis sativa*. The main active chemical in marijuana is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC for short. (NIDA)

## What does marijuana do to the brain?

- THC rapidly passes from the lungs into the bloodstream, which carries the chemical to the brain and other organs throughout the body. THC acts upon specific sites in the brain, called cannabinoid receptors, kicking off a series of cellular reactions that ultimately lead to the "high" that users experience when they use marijuana. (NIDA)

## Is marijuana addictive? Is it harmful?

- One in nine people who smoke marijuana regularly becomes dependent on it. (Harvard Mental Health Letter 2010)
- The daily use of one to three marijuana joints appears to produce approximately the same lung damage and potential cancer risk as smoking five times as many cigarettes. (UCLA)
- Research into the effects of long-term cannabis use on the structure of the brain has yielded inconsistent results. (NIDA)

## Is marijuana a "gateway drug"?

- Adolescent marijuana use increases the odds of other illicit substance use two to three times by young adulthood. (Mayet et al., 2011)

## National and Local Data:

- Marijuana abuse accounts for 67 percent of adolescent substance-abuse admissions nationally. Marijuana abuse/dependence is also the number one reason why youth in Colorado are admitted for substance-abuse treatment. (NSDUH, 2010)
- Nationwide, 58 percent of new marijuana users are under the age of 18. (SAMHSA)
- 22 percent of Colorado high school students report marijuana use in the last 30 days. (2011 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey)
- At Arapahoe House, marijuana is the number one drug of use for adolescent clients, the number two drug of use for adult clients (the number one is alcohol).



Arapahoe House