

# Summit County, Colorado

## Case Study: InForming a Public Campaign About Marijuana Risks to Youth

### ABOUT SUMMIT COUNTY:

Summit County is a rural mountainous county in Colorado with a population of roughly 30,000 people. The county has a tourism-based economy, with four major ski resorts, and approximately 80 percent of county land is federal public land. The county has a strong recreational culture, particularly outdoor recreation. Legal recreational marijuana sales outlets include no fewer than ten marijuana stores.

### BACKGROUND

In 2012, Colorado voted to legalize recreational marijuana. People age 21 or older can grow up to six plants (with certain restrictions), possess the marijuana produced by those plants, possess up to one ounce outside their home, and consume marijuana for recreational purposes.

With these changes to Colorado law, new potential issues with access and safety arose. For this particular effort, Summit County wanted to develop a public health campaign aimed at enlisting adults to help prevent youth access to marijuana. Therefore, to inform the formation of the campaign, the research sought to learn: current perceptions around the safety of marijuana (especially for youth vs. adults), current approval or disapproval of use, beliefs of impacts of marijuana on youth, and storage perceptions and practices.

“Summit County has been privileged to work with Corona Insights on several projects over the last few years. Case in point, a recent baseline community survey on adult substance use and perception of harm was presented at the annual American Public Health Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. This survey, requested and supported by the four towns in Summit County became the impetus for continued youth substance use prevention and education with the goal of healthy social and emotional family well-being.”

Laurie Blackwell, HFI Program Coordinator,  
Summit County

### STRATEGY

To create a public health campaign aimed at enlisting adults to help prevent youth access to marijuana.

### RESEARCH TOPICS

- ➔ Perceptions of the safety of marijuana use for youth, and safety for youth in comparison to adult use.
- ➔ Perceptions of the safety of youth use of marijuana compared to youth use of other drugs.
- ➔ Current approval or disapproval of youth use.
- ➔ Perceptions of risk in various physical activities after using marijuana.
- ➔ Beliefs about impacts of marijuana on youth.
- ➔ Perceived importance of safe storage of marijuana.
- ➔ Current practices of marijuana storage.



## CORONA'S SOLUTION

To address these goals, this study focused particularly on two key audiences, parents and young adults, with additional input from the general public, certain key young worker segments, and Spanish speakers. Specific segments, data collection modes, and numbers of completed surveys are highlighted below:

- ➔ Parents of students in Summit County Schools: 282 responses were obtained from parents via online surveys.
- ➔ Young adults (ages 21-35) in Summit County: 200 responses were obtained from young adults through a telephone survey.
- ➔ English Speakers in the General Public: 242 responses were obtained from English speakers in the general public through an online survey.
- ➔ Spanish Speakers in the General Public: 112 responses were obtained from Spanish speakers in the general public through surveys collected at the Family & Intercultural Resource Center and the Care Clinic.
- ➔ Colorado Mountain College Students/Ski Area Employees: 107 responses were obtained from this audience, primarily through online surveys distributed by partner organizations.

## KEY FINDINGS

Findings both confirmed and quantified some assumptions while also leading to new insights. For example, people think differently about youth use vs. adult use, with both parents and youth more likely to believe that marijuana is less safe for youth than for adults. Interestingly, though, both also believed that secondhand marijuana smoke was less safe than actual use.

Young adults were also more likely to view marijuana as safer than

cigarettes, and they were less likely to believe that it impairs physical activity. Similarly, young adults were more skeptical of the risks of marijuana to youth.

### % Who Believe It's "Very Unsafe"

	Parents	Young Adults
Smoking Cigarettes	97%	89%
Secondhand Smoke – Cigarettes	75%	53%
Using Marijuana regularly	48%	10%
Secondhand Smoke – Marijuana	52%	17%

Parents believed that prevention measures are important; however, risky behaviors were not uncommon, in terms of usage and storage in households where youth live.

## THE OUTCOME

The results of this research provided the insight the client needed to move forward with their campaign, including identifying current norms and what segments may be good allies in communicating messages. Specifically, the following steps are underway by the client, informed by the research:

- ➔ Youth social norms media outreach at Summit County schools.
- ➔ "Communities That Care" youth coalition that will create and administer a survey to peers.
- ➔ Summit County "Communities That Care" youth substance use grant continuation years two through five.
- ➔ Collaboration with Colorado's multi-media marijuana outreach campaigns to parents.
- ➔ Retail marijuana education and prevention outreach, disseminating information to increase knowledge of the laws and health effects.



*This research was also selected for presentation at the 2017 APHA Conference in Atlanta, GA.*