

NEWS RELEASE

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Healthy Missoula Youth Coalition Launches Youth Marijuana Prevention Campaign

You might have heard an ad on the radio from the Healthy Missoula Youth coalition launching a media campaign called “CannWeChat? Equipping Parents to Talk with Their Kids About Cannabis.” The goal of this campaign is to encourage Missoula County parents and caregivers to talk to their children about the potential risks of using marijuana at an early age.

Parents can visit cannwechat.org, a website filled with information about having effective conversations with their children about cannabis. The website explains how cannabis products have become significantly more potent over the years and what harms are related to using high-THC products regularly at an early age. The website also covers warning signs that parents should be looking out for and how to get help.

According to the state’s Cannabis Control Division, Missoula County is home to 59 cannabis dispensaries and has one of the highest numbers of dispensaries per capita in the nation. Even though the legal age for marijuana consumption is 21, youth marijuana usage has spiked since statewide legalization began in 2020. In 2021, 24.5% of Missoula County high schoolers used marijuana on a regular basis, compared to 20% in 2019, which indicates a 22% increase in just two years, according to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Between 2016 to 2021, emergency department encounters and hospitalizations for cannabis-related disorders increased 32% for teens ages 15 to 19 in Missoula County, according to the Montana Hospital Association and the Center for Population Health Research at the University of Montana.

The Healthy Missoula Youth coalition is facilitated by the Substance Use Disorder Prevention program at Missoula Public Health. Both work to prevent early substance use and raise awareness of potential harms, including impacts on brain development, lowering academic success, harming both physical and mental health and posing higher rates of substance use disorder.

Healthy Missoula Youth works to prevent and reduce youth marijuana use through a multi-pronged approach: education for youth, families, and schools; policy and law advocacy; and a public health media campaign directed at parents and caregivers. Substance Use Disorder Prevention and Healthy Missoula Youth receive funding from the Center for Children, Families and Workforce Development at the University of

Montana, All Nations Health Center and the Montana State University Extension Office to develop and disseminate the media campaign.