

**REPORT OF THE STATE COUNCIL OF
HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA**

**State Council of Higher Education
for Virginia Recommendations
Regarding Education and
Prevention Strategies Relating to
Marijuana (Chapter 55, 2021 SSI)**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



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**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
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TO: The Honorable Ralph N. Northam
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia

FR: Peter Blake

SUBJ: **SCHEV Recommendations Regarding Education and Prevention Strategies Relating to Marijuana**

On behalf of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, I am pleased to submit SCHEV's recommendations regarding education and prevention strategies relating to marijuana, pursuant to SB 1406.

I. Legislative History

SB 1406 (Ebbin) was enacted in the 2021 General Assembly. The bill included an enactment clause, as follows:

The Secretary of Education, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, the Virginia Higher Education Substance Use Advisory Committee, and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services shall work with existing collegiate recovery programs to determine what, if any, additional evidence-based efforts should be undertaken for college-aged individuals to promote education and prevention strategies relating to marijuana. The plan shall include the estimated cost of implementation and any potential source of funds to cover such cost and shall be submitted to the Governor and the General Assembly by November 1, 2021.

The full text of the bill can be found here: <https://lis.virginia.gov/000/chapter550.pdf>.

II. Background

This report primarily relies upon the Virginia Higher Education Substance Abuse Prevention Strategic Plan 2021-2026 ("the Strategic Plan") and recognizes the Virginia Higher Education Substance Use Advisory Committee (VHESUAC) as the appropriate

entity to assess whether the enactment of SB1406 created any gaps that should be addressed as the Strategic Plan proceeds in its implementation phase and to develop cost estimates for additional recommended programming.

The charge is largely duplicative of comprehensive work that has already been performed on this topic that resulted in the recently issued Virginia Higher Education Substance Abuse Prevention Strategic Plan 2021-2026 (“Strategic Plan”). Pursuant to legislation in 2018, the Virginia ABC Board established and appointed members to the Virginia Higher Education Substance Use Advisory Committee (VHESUAC). The VHESUAC has a duty to develop and update a statewide strategic plan for substance use education, prevention, intervention and recovery at Virginia’s public and private IHEs. Code of Virginia §4.1-103.02.

This report fulfills the charge set forth in the SB 1406 enactment clause, as follows:

- Input from collegiate recovery programs: The Strategic Plan was performed with substantial input from collegiate recovery programs. A workgroup that meets regularly includes “community, state, and campus leaders who were identified and recruited due to their work in preventing college substance misuse and related problems”. Strategic Plan, page 4. In addition, a stakeholder analysis determined that staff at institutions who are responsible for student programs, counseling, health, etc., had a medium to high level of involvement in the development of the recommendations. Strategic Plan, page 14. In addition, feedback from the college recovery programs was solicited regarding draft recommendations for this report and was duly incorporated.
- Plan for continuous evidence-based review and updates: Implementation of the Strategic Plan will occur over five years. VHESUAC will sustain its efforts on statewide initiatives by continuing to promote a collaborative and coordinated effort among Virginia’s colleges and universities to advocate for prevention programming and treatment services, implement research based approaches, and facilitate a network for information sharing and action planning.
- Consequences of marijuana misuse does not require alternative programming from other substance misuse, but increased levels of programming are warranted: The Strategic Plan reviewed data on various types of substance use by college students, citing the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health’s finding that 21% of full-time college students, age 18-22, had used marijuana in the past month. The health and safety consequences of AOD misuse can be significant; however “the consequences of AOD misuse are similar regardless of

the type of substance misuse". Strategic Plan, p. 8, citing O'Grady, K.E., Arria, A.M., Fitzelle, D.M., & Wish, E.D. (2008) "Heavy drinking and polydrug use among college students, *Journal of Drug Issues*, 38(2), 445-465 (emphasis added). However, in anticipation of potential increased in marijuana usage due to legalization, the level of programming and education should be increased to counter decreased perceptions of risk and increased experimentation.

Recommendations

1. To facilitate sharing of information and data across departments, the Virginia Cannabis Control Authority should appoint a member of the Cannabis Public Health Advisory Council to serve on the VHESUAC Workgroup.
2. The VHESUAC should continue to collaborate with collegiate recovery programs on the immediate development of programming to counter decreased perceptions of risk and increased experimentation with marijuana on Virginia's college campuses. Such collaboration should address estimated costs of appropriate programming that may be included in future budget requests.
3. VHESUAC's assessment of the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan and any progress reports should include analysis of issues surrounding the legalization of marijuana that warrant additional educational programming to prevent marijuana misuse by students.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the report or any other higher education matters.

cc: Atif Qarni, Secretary of Education
Katie Crumble, Virginia ABC
Gail Taylor, Department of Behavioral and Developmental Services

