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Vermont Legislature's Views on the Reliability and Accessibility of Available Resources Regarding Public Health Concerns of Youth Marijuana Use

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Vermont Legislators' Views on the Reliability and Accessibility of Available Resources

Regarding Public Health Concerns of Youth Marijuana Use

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Introduction

- In 2018, Vermont legislation legalized possession and limited cultivation of marijuana for persons over 21. Proposals are on the docket for the upcoming legislative sessions in 2020 to legalize and tax commercial sale of marijuana¹
- Little data exist to characterize the ways legislators interact with, perceive, and utilize growing knowledge surrounding youth marijuana use.
- Current medical knowledge surrounding the public health impacts of the legal commercial sale of marijuana on youth is inconsistent, insufficient, and poorly understood by the public.
- American Academy of Pediatrics policy statements emphasize the importance of preventing and decriminalizing youth marijuana use while further studying the effects of marijuana through federal rescheduling and population studies in states where the commercial sale of marijuana is currently legal.²
- While legalization of marijuana presents a variety of policy options, knowledge of the effects of policies will take a "generation or more to manifest."³

Methods

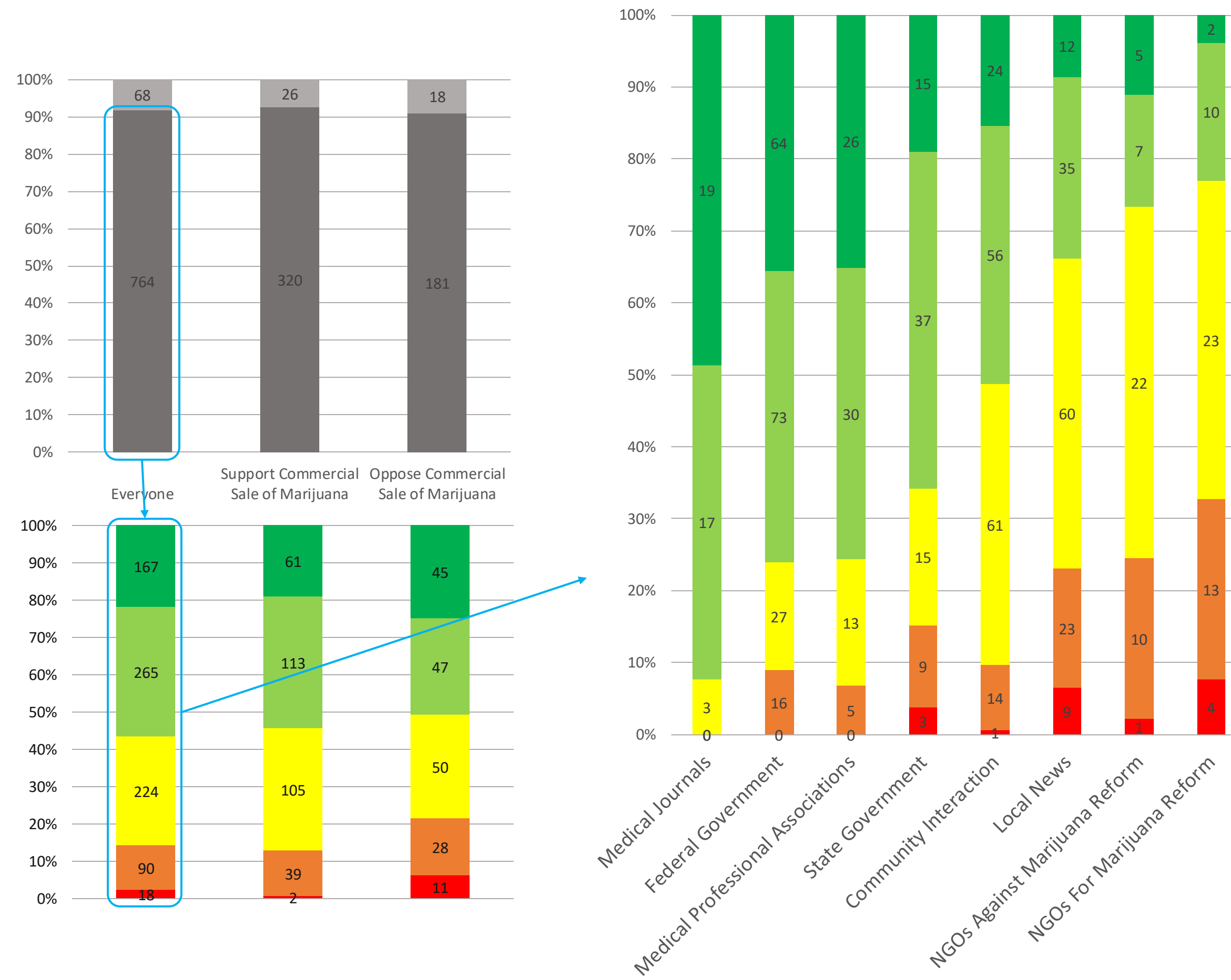
- Questions included in the survey were designed to collect relevant demographics, assess barriers to and sources of public health knowledge, and measure current perceptions of the public health impacts of the commercial sale of marijuana on youth.
- Survey was distributed to all elected members of the Vermont legislators (n=179) utilizing email addresses listed on the official state government website. In total, 40 responses were received.
- Data were analyzed for significance using Fisher's exact test to compare the responses of those supporting commercial sale legalization versus those who do not.

Discussion

- Vermont legislatures find information on youth public health effects of marijuana provided by medical journals and associations and by federal and state government to be reliable, whereas information provided by NGOs for or against marijuana reform was found to be unreliable. Though both opposers and supporters of commercial sale find the same information reliable, opposers and supporters have considerably different beliefs regarding how the commercial sale would affect youth public health.
- Vermont legislators feel they need more information on marijuana's effects on youth cognitive development, youth mental health, and youth behavioral issues.
- It is critical to identify and disseminate reliable information regarding youth public health effects of marijuana due to the likelihood that the commercial sale of marijuana will continue to expand throughout the United States.

Results

Figure 1. Reported reliability of information sources

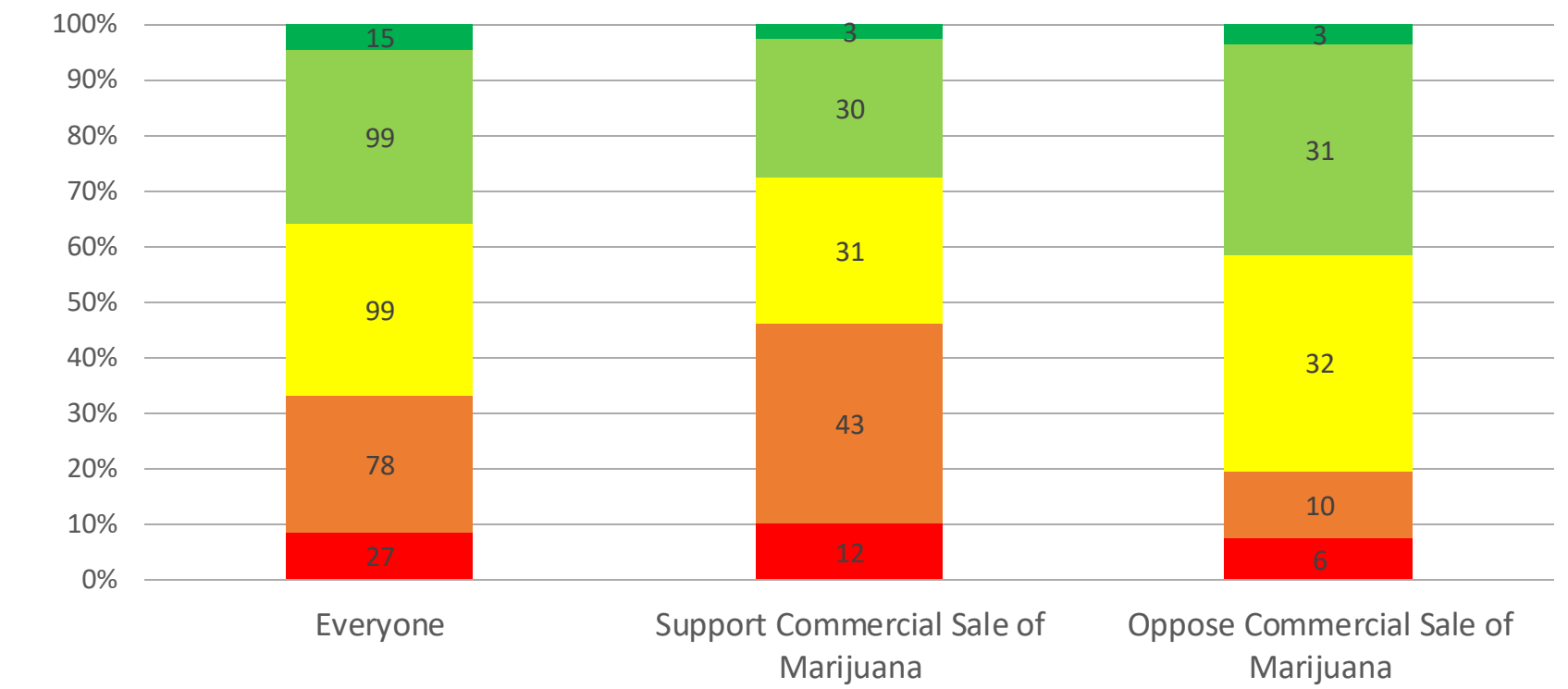


Legend

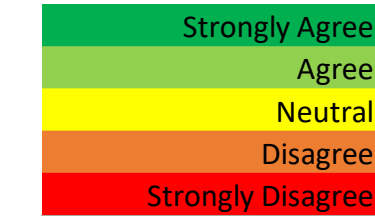


23 sources of information were provided to respondents to rate their reliability. Most sources were viewed favorably. Only 14% of total responses were "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" that the sources were reliable. Additionally, there was little difference between the responses of Supporters and Opposers. Legislatures found the following groups of sources from most to least reliable as follows: medical journals, federal government, medical professional associations, state government, community interactions, local news, NGOs against marijuana reform, and NGOs for marijuana reform.

Figure 2. Reported barriers to accessing information in aggregate

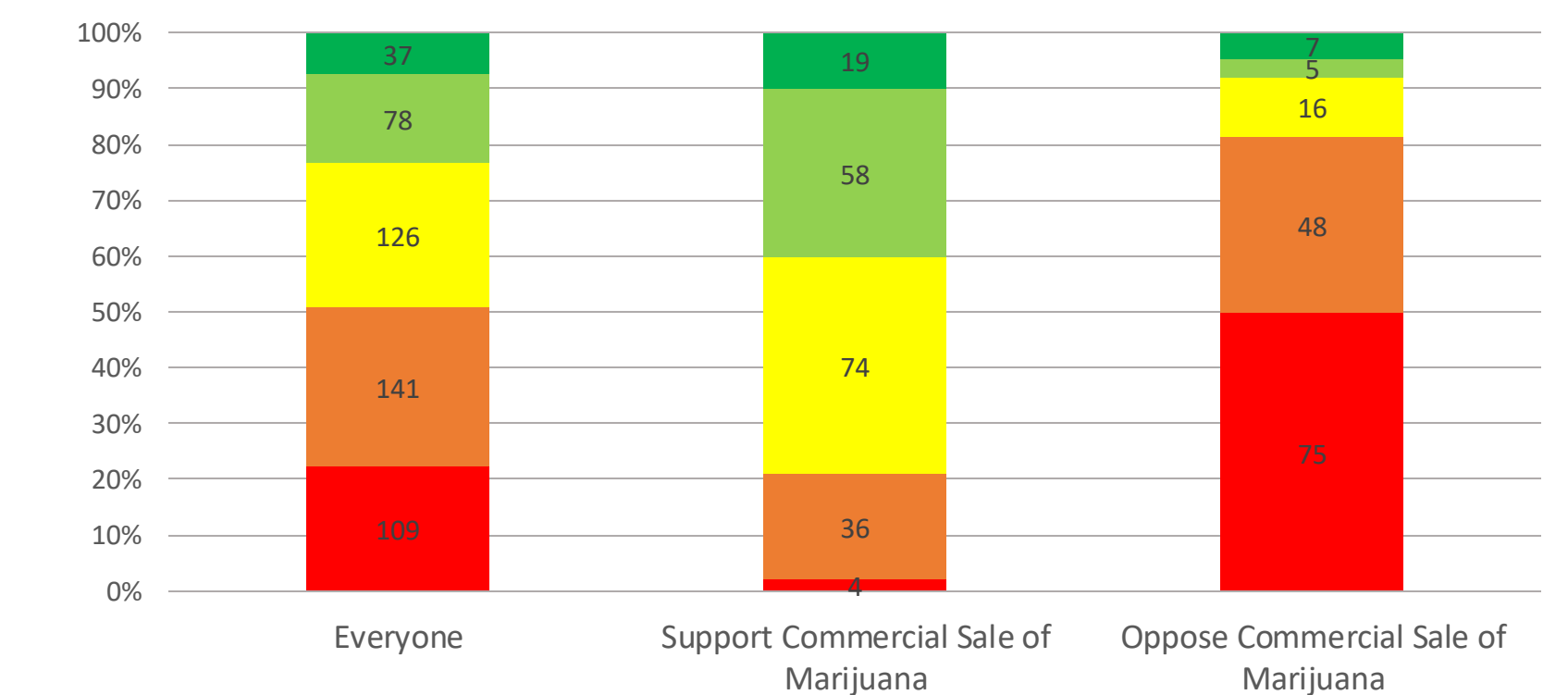


Legend



10 total barriers were provided. Opposers "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" considerably more than Supporters that the barriers prevent the use of marijuana research. The biggest perceived barrier to using marijuana research in legislative decisions is "Lack of Time."

Figure 3. Perceived youth public health outcomes of commercial sale



Legend



Respondents were asked how the commercial sale of marijuana would affect public health for 14 youth public health issues. 11% of total responses were "Need More Data". These responses were excluded from Figure 3. Opposers believe the commercial sale of marijuana will "Unfavorably" or "Strongly Unfavorably" affect public health considerably more than Supporters. The most concerning public health issues were youth use of marijuana, youth mental health, and youth cognitive development.

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