

# Marijuana Tax Fund: Evaluation of Diversion Substance Use Prevention Efforts

*Report 2020*



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# **Marijuana Tax Fund: Evaluation of Diversion Substance Use Prevention Efforts *Report 2020***

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# Executive Summary

## 2020 Annual Report

### Colorado Juvenile Diversion's Marijuana Tax Fund

From fiscal year 2016-2017 through 2019-2020, seven of the eighteen DCJ-funded Colorado juvenile diversion programs received additional resources from the Marijuana Tax Fund to address substance use among the youth their programs serve. While all juvenile diversion programs worked to address the needs of youth in their programs, these seven programs received additional funds to explicitly support substance use-related training and certifications for staff, provision of substance use prevention/intervention curricula, and to offset costs that are otherwise passed on to the youth and family for substance use assessment and treatment, and drug and alcohol testing. This report examines a subset of diversion youth data from those programs receiving Marijuana Tax Fund dollars with a specific focus on comparing outcomes for the diversion youth who received services paid for by the Marijuana Tax Fund compared to those that did not receive these services within the funded programs.



Nearly all youth served by Marijuana Tax Funded programs were screened for substance use issues and received assessment if needed.



Youth served by Marijuana Tax Funded programs who reported substance use at intake, reported lower marijuana and alcohol use at exit from diversion.



Within Marijuana Tax Funded programs, youth who received services supported through the fund were more likely to indicate need for substance use treatment and receive treatment than youth who did not receive funded services.



Of youth who received services supported through the Marijuana Tax Fund, **86%** of youth who needed substance use treatment also needed mental health treatment.



Youth who received Marijuana Tax-funded services entered diversion with fewer protective factors and greater risk factors than youth who did not receive these services, but the services provided through the Marijuana Tax Fund narrowed the gaps between the two groups.



Recidivism rates decreased for Marijuana Tax-funded programs after receiving Marijuana Tax Funds, suggesting that the services supported by these funds provided youth with the resources they needed to prevent them from penetrating the criminal justice system further.



Youth who were successful had greater self-esteem and lower intentions to engage in risky behaviors. Programs should identify specific opportunities to support youth in increasing self-esteem (mental health support) as well as reducing risky behaviors.

Youth have benefited from these funds by reducing substance use, improving their psychosocial outcomes and reducing overall rates of re-offense. Continued support of programs' work will be necessary to ensure the gains observed in the last three years are not lost in future years.

# 2020 Annual Report

## Colorado Juvenile Diversion's Marijuana Tax Fund

From fiscal year 2016-2017 through 2019-2020, seven of the eighteen DCJ-funded Colorado juvenile diversion programs received additional resources from the Marijuana Tax Fund to address substance use among the youth their programs serve. While all juvenile diversion programs worked to address the needs of youth in their programs, these seven programs received additional funds to explicitly support substance use-related training and certifications for staff, provision of substance use prevention/intervention curricula, and to offset costs that are otherwise passed on to the youth and family for substance use assessment and treatment, and drug and alcohol testing. This report examines a subset of diversion youth data from those programs receiving Marijuana Tax Fund dollars with a specific focus on comparing outcomes for the diversion youth who received services paid for by the Marijuana Tax Fund compared to those that did not receive these services within the funded programs.

### Youth Served\*\*

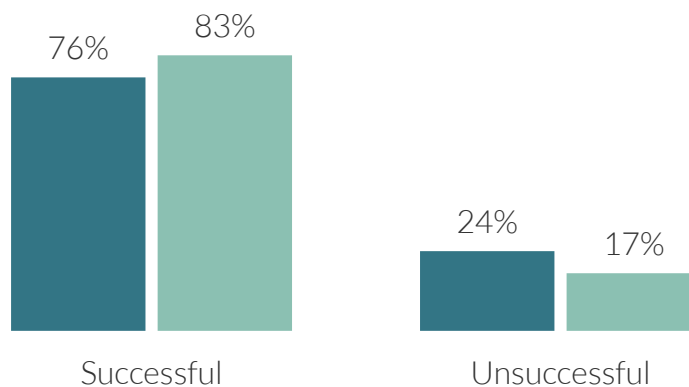


2,453 youth were served by programs receiving MJ funds



765 youth (31%) received MJ-funded services

Most youth were successful, with success rates for youth receiving MJ-funded services slightly lower than youth not receiving MJ funds.

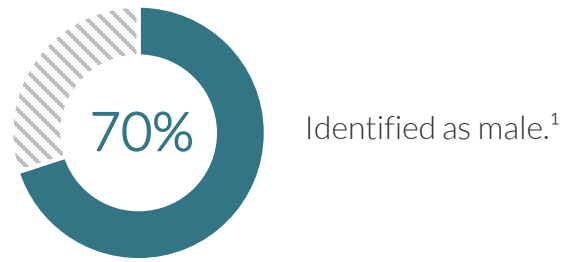


\*18th JD Juvenile Diversion Counseling Program, Center for Family Outreach, Delta County Juvenile Diversion Program, Denver DA Diversion Program, La Plata Youth Services, Mesa County Partners, and YouthZone.

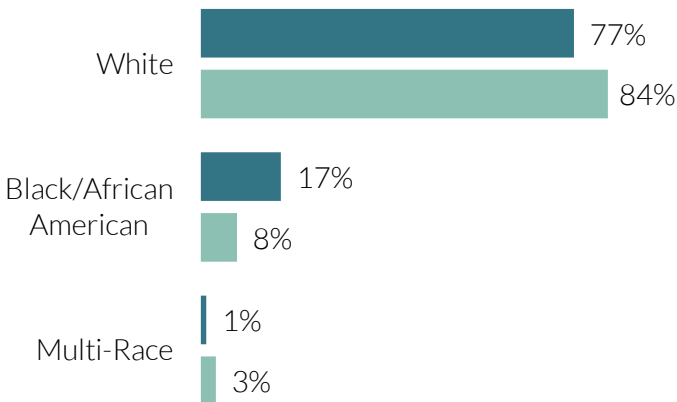
\*\*Data from FY1920 was only reflective of the first half of the fiscal year.

# Demographics/Background Information

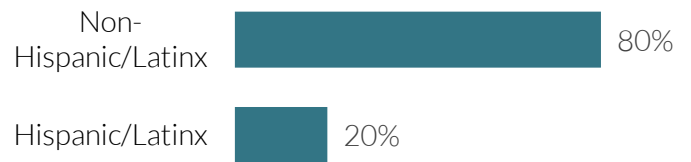
Overall, few differences were observed between youth who received services paid for by Marijuana Tax funds and those who did not. Specifically, age, gender, and ethnicity of the youth who did and did not receive Marijuana Tax-funded services were similar.



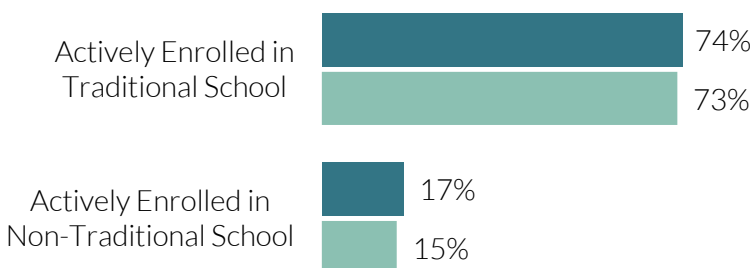
Youth who received MJ-funded services primarily identified as white, Black/African American, or multi-race.<sup>2</sup> Proportionately, more Black youth were served by MJ funds.



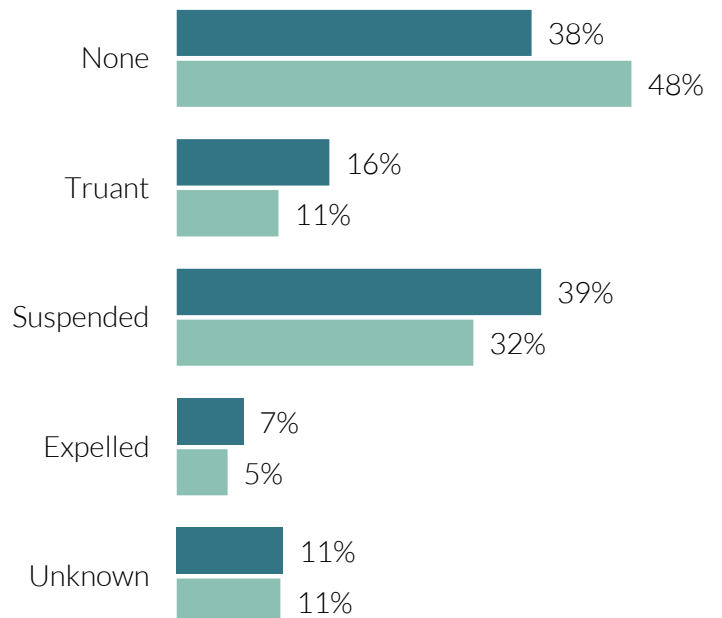
The majority of youth identified as Non-Hispanic/Latinx.



Nearly all youth were actively enrolled in school<sup>3</sup> and rates of enrollment did not differ between youth who received MJ-funded services and youth with no MJ-funded services.

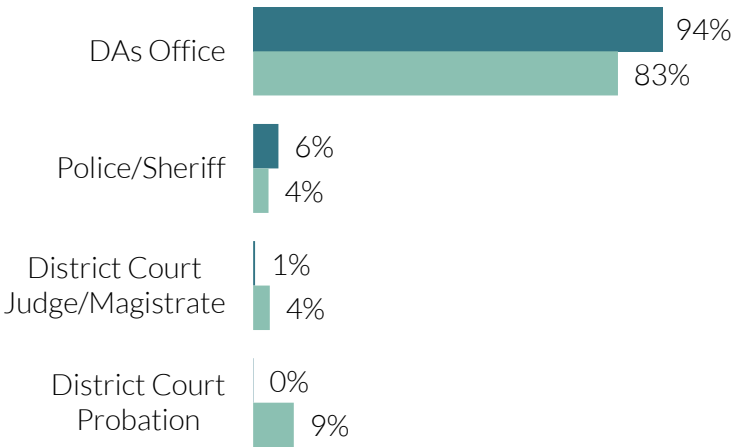


More MJ-funded youth had a history of suspension, truancy and expulsion compared to youth not receiving MJ-funded services.

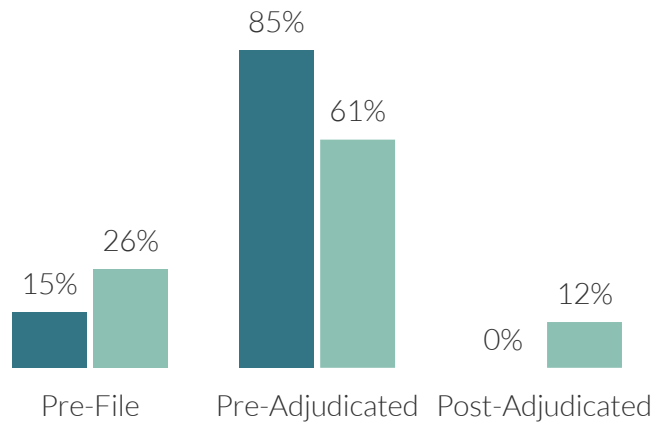


# Referral Information

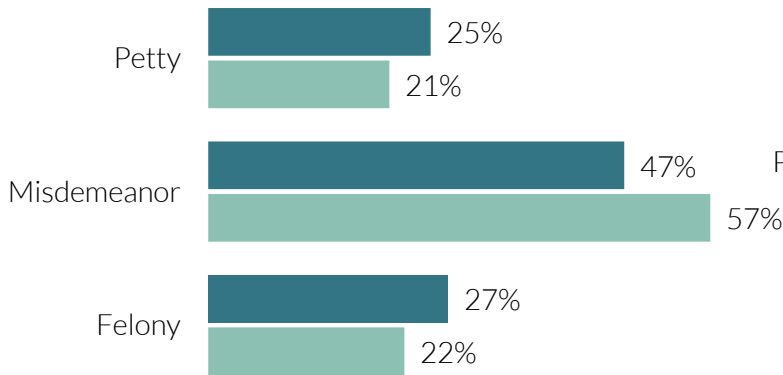
Nearly all youth receiving MJ-funded services were referred through the DAs Office.



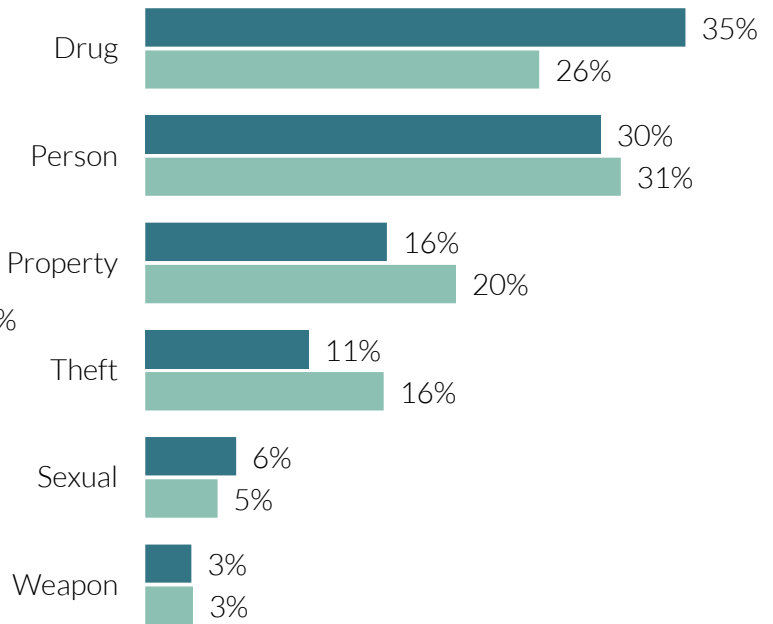
A greater proportion of youth receiving MJ-funded services were referred at Pre-Adjudication compared to youth not receiving MJ-funded services.



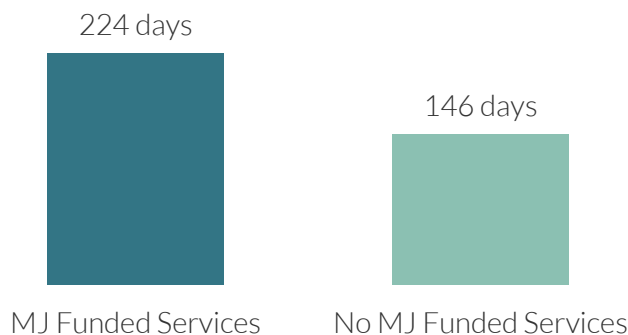
Overall most youth were referred for misdemeanor offenses, though youth receiving MJ-funded services tended to be referred for a petty or felony offense more often than youth not receiving MJ-funded services.



Person and drug related offenses combined to account for about two-thirds of cases for youth receiving MJ-funded services.



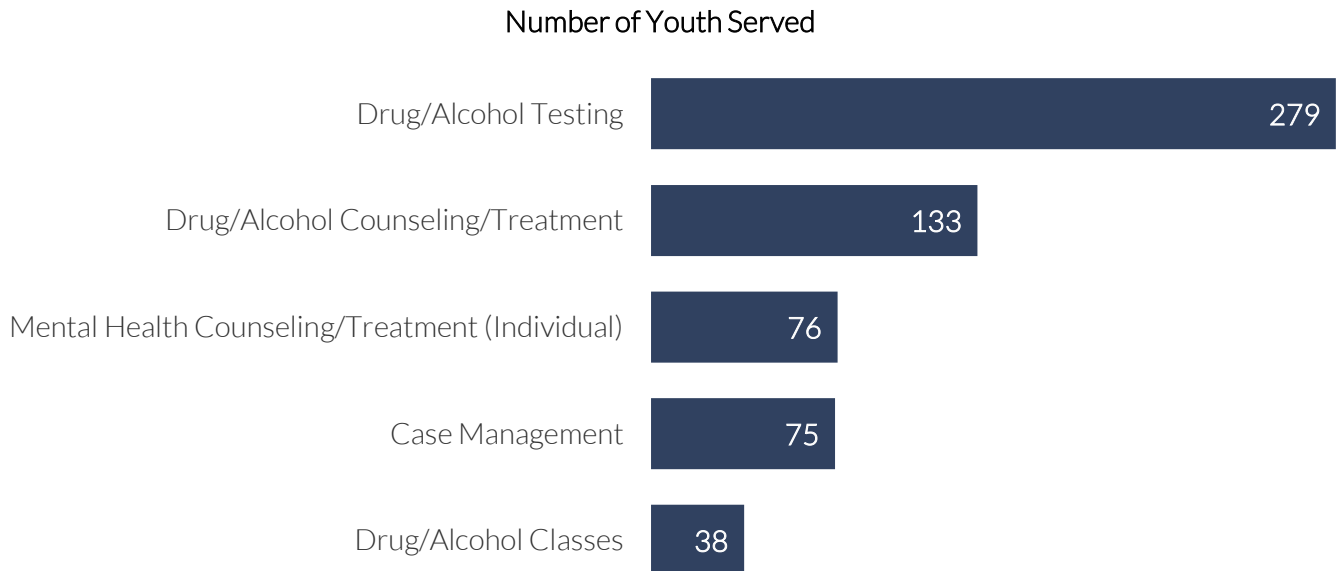
Youth who received MJ-funded services spent more time in diversion suggesting these youth have greater needs.



# Services

Youth received many wraparound services while participating in diversion. For each service, programs tracked whether traditional DCJ diversion funds, Marijuana Tax funds, or other funding sources paid for the service.

Of the top five services for which Marijuana Tax funds were used, **drug/alcohol testing** was the service most often paid for by the funds.



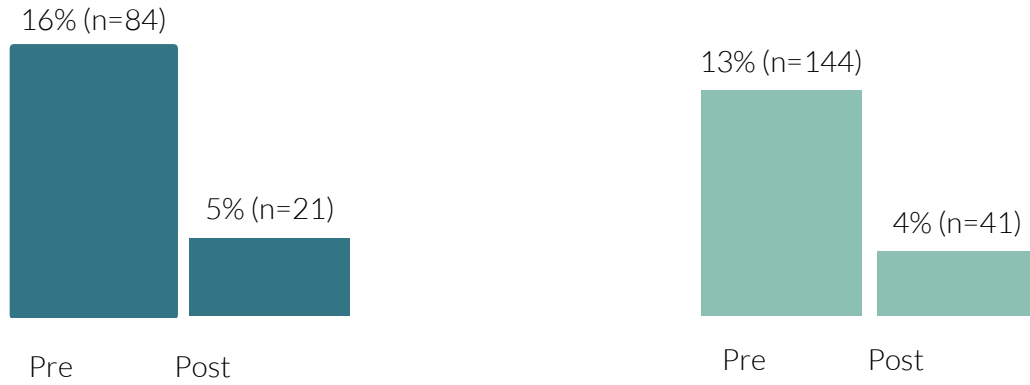
Other services paid for by the Marijuana Tax funds included:

- Diagnostic Assessment
- Life Skills
- Mental Health Counseling/Treatment (Family)
- Mental Health Counseling/Treatment (Group)
- Multi-Agency Assessment
- Offense-Specific Classes
- Offense-Specific Treatment
- Pro-Social Activities
- RJ Conference/Circle Planning
- RJ Conference/Circle
- Victim Empathy Classes

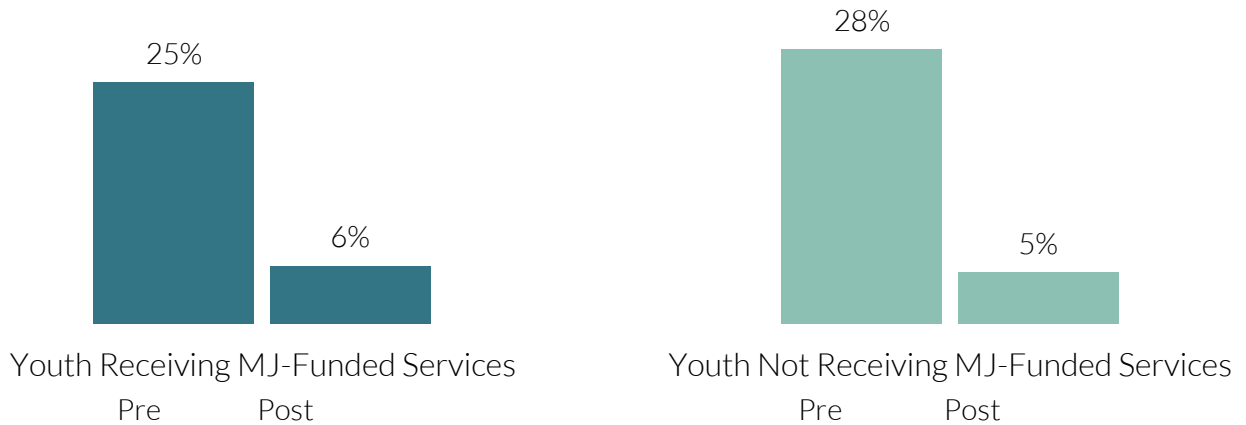
# Past 30-Day Substance Use

Successful youth who completed both a pre- and post-survey provided information about their past 30-day use of alcohol, marijuana, or other illegal drugs.

Overall, both **youth receiving MJ-funded services** and **those who did not receive MJ-funded services** reported lower alcohol use at post versus pre time points.\*



Overall, youth reports of marijuana use decreased from pre to post, regardless of whether they received services paid for by the Marijuana Tax Fund.



Overall, few youth (n<14) reported illicit drug use at any point. Of those who did report illicit drug use, reported usage decreased from pre to post, regardless of whether they received MJ-funded services.

\*Past 30-day substance use was collected on the pre- and post-surveys. However, post-surveys were only collected from youth who successfully completed diversion; thus, post-survey reported use is reflective of past 30-day use of successful youth.



# Screening and Assessment of Substance Use and Mental Health

The diversion programs receiving Marijuana Tax funds were required to report on three targeted outcomes;

1. increases in the numbers of youth who were systematically screened for and provided assessment and treatment as indicated for substance use;
2. numbers of youth showing significant improvement from pre-survey to post-survey on psychological and behavioral predictors of delinquency; and,
3. reductions in the overall state program's recidivism rate, including improving successful diversion completion rates.

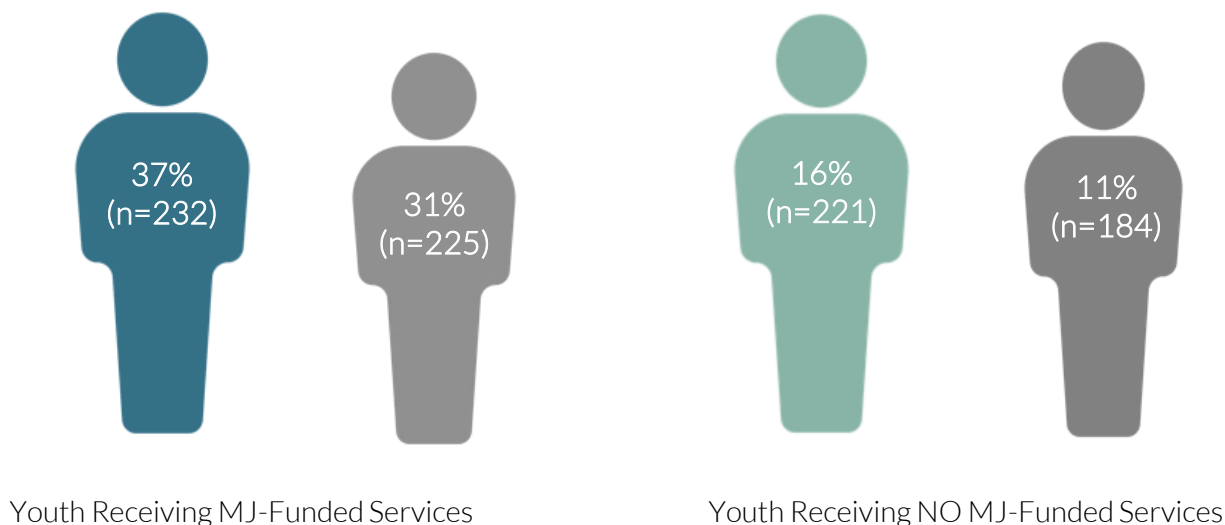
## Substance Use

Nearly all youth (96%) who were served by programs receiving the Marijuana Tax funds were screened for substance use issues, and of those who needed assessment, 94% were assessed, regardless of whether they received Marijuana Tax-funded services.

Compared to youth who did not receive Marijuana Tax-funded services, youth receiving Marijuana Tax-funded services were more likely to **indicate need for substance use treatment** and **receive treatment**.

Of all youth receiving MJ-funded services slightly more youth **indicated a need for substance use treatment** than received treatment.

Of all youth not receiving MJ-funded services, **more indicated need for substance use treatment** than received treatment.



# Mental Health

Nearly all youth (93%) who were served by programs receiving the Marijuana Tax funds were screened for mental health concerns and assessed (88%) when a screening indicated that an assessment was necessary.

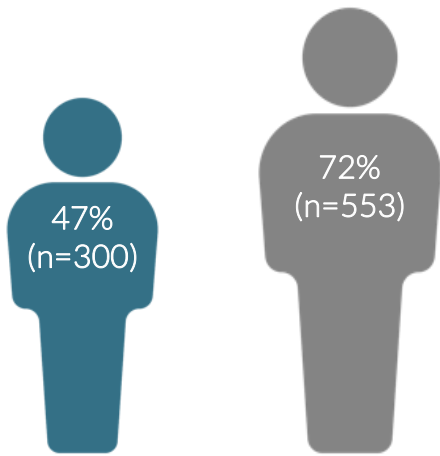
Individual, group, or family counseling or treatment services were considered mental health treatment provided to the youth.

Of youth who received services paid for by the Marijuana Tax Fund and information was provided about whether or not they needed treatment, 47% of youth were reported as needing mental health treatment which was a larger proportion than the 31% of youth who did not receiving Marijuana Tax-funded services and needed treatment.

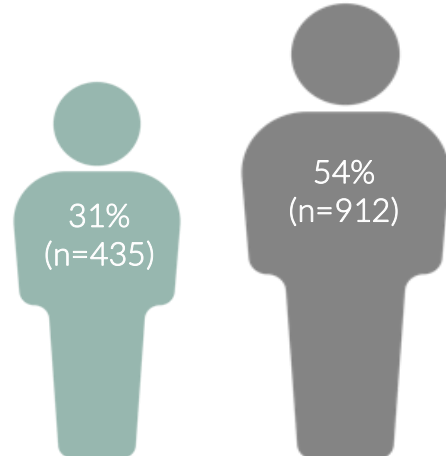
Of all Marijuana Tax-funded youth, 72% received at least one type of mental health treatment compared to 54% of youth who did not receive Marijuana Tax funds.

Of all youth who received MJ-funded Services, fewer youth indicated a need for mental health treatment than received treatment.

Of youth receiving no MJ-funded services fewer youth indicated a need for mental health treatment than received treatment.

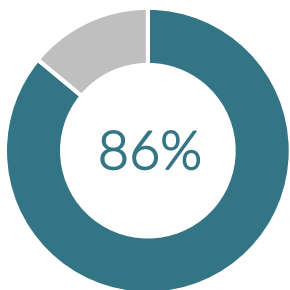


Youth receiving MJ-Funded Services

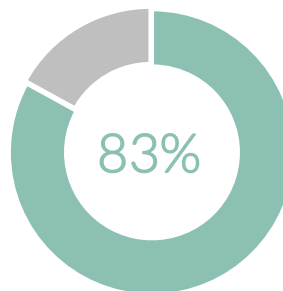


Youth receiving NO MJ-Funded Services

## Co-occurring Mental Health Needs



of youth receiving MJ-funded services who needed substance use treatment also indicated need for mental health treatment.

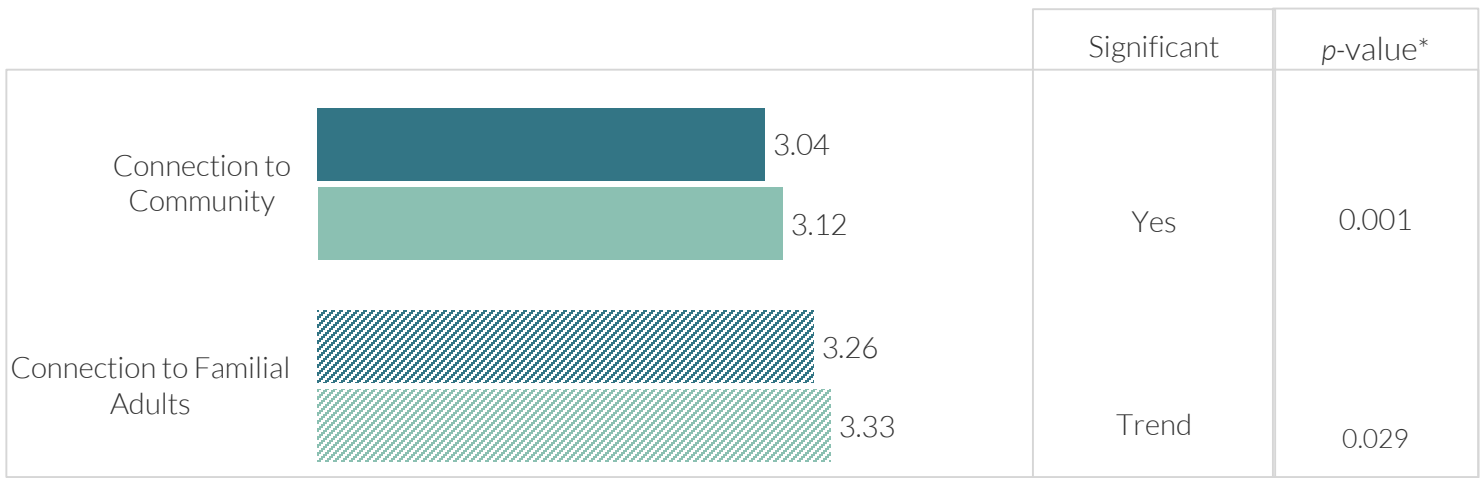


of youth not receiving MJ-funded services who needed substance use treatment also indicated need for mental health treatment.

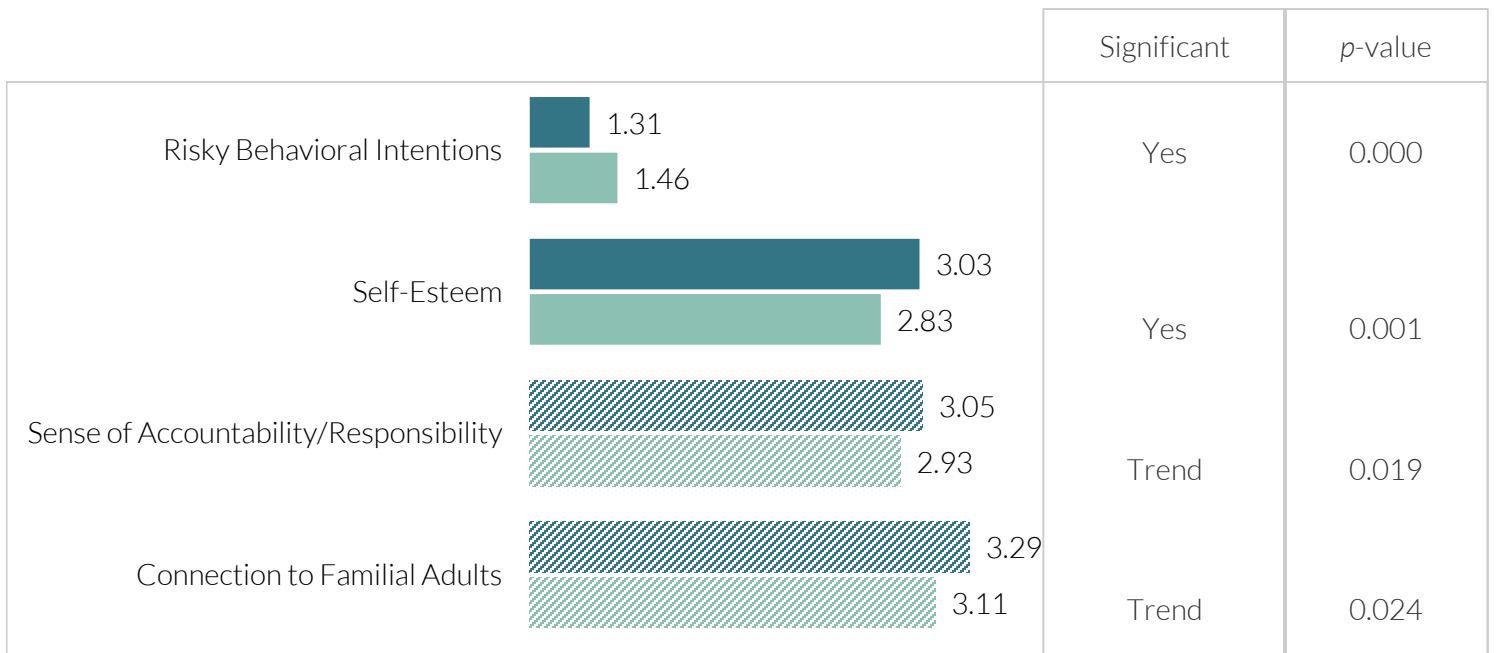
# Short-term Psychosocial Outcomes

All youth who participated in diversion were asked to complete a pre- and post- diversion survey assessing several short-term psychosocial outcomes. All youth served by Marijuana Tax-funded programs reported significant increases in protective factors such as their sense of accountability, connection to community, connection to adults, self esteem and locus of control. All youth also reported significant decreases in stress and risky behavioral intentions. No significant differences in the short-term outcomes were observed between youth receiving Marijuana Tax-funded services and youth not receiving the funded services.

Youth served by MJ-funded services are entering the programs with fewer protective factors than their non-MJ-funded counterparts. At Intake, **youth who received MJ-funded services** reported significantly lower **connection to the community** than **youth with no MJ-funded services** and also tended to report lower **connection to familial adults**.



Among youth receiving MJ-funded services, **successful youth** had significantly lower **Risky Behavioral intentions** and significantly higher **self-esteem** compared to youth who were **unsuccessful**. Additionally, trending towards significance, youth who were **successful** had a higher sense of accountability and connection to familial adults compared to **unsuccessful youth**.

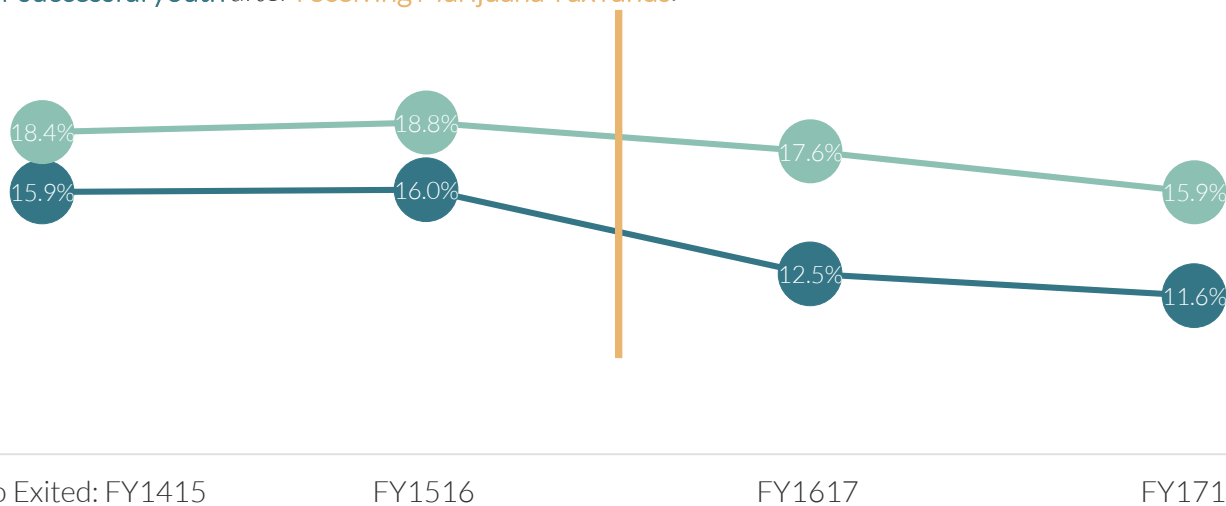


\*Statistical significance was determined at a p-value of < 0.01 and trending significance at a p-value of < 0.03

# Recidivism

In order to understand the association of the Marijuana Tax funds with recidivism, recidivism rates for the seven programs were compared over time (FY15-16 prior to MJ funds; FY17-18 post MJ funds). Recidivism was defined as a filing that resulted from a new offense while the youth was enrolled in diversion or within 12 months after completing diversion.

The recidivism rate for programs receiving Marijuana Tax funds decreased **overall** and, as expected, rates decreased more so **for successful youth** after **receiving Marijuana Tax funds**.



## Summary

Overall, programs receiving Marijuana Tax funds have been able to provide nearly universal screening and assessment to youth in their programs. Youth receiving services paid for by the Marijuana Tax funds are receiving the needed treatment at a higher rate than youth not receiving Marijuana Tax-funded services indicating that the Marijuana funds are being spent in support of the stated goals. Youth are receiving mental health treatment or counseling at a high rate with more youth receiving these services than are indicated as needing them based on assessment data tracked. This finding coupled with discussions with program staff, suggests the need to better understand how and whether the interventions being tracked as mental health treatments are truly clinical treatment services or if there is a need to more accurately track assessment results and decisions to provide treatment.

Youth receiving services paid for by the Marijuana Tax funds and completing diversion successfully are increasing their psychosocial behavioral outcomes from intake (pre) to exit (post). While at intake, youth who are receiving Marijuana Tax-funded services show a significantly lower connection to community than those not receiving Marijuana Tax-funded services, no differences between the two groups are found at exit. This finding indicates these youth are entering diversion with fewer protective factors and greater risk factors, but the services provided through the Marijuana Tax Fund are increasing their connection to community sufficiently by the end of the program to close the gap between the two groups. Marijuana Tax-funded youth who are successful also report higher pre-survey scores than their unsuccessful counterparts on self-esteem and lower scores on risky behavioral intentions suggesting an opportunity for programming to intentionally focus on these two outcome areas.

Recidivism rates have decreased for Marijuana Tax-funded programs suggesting that youth are receiving the resources they need to prevent them from penetrating the criminal justice system further.

# Recommendations

- **Continued support of programs' work to support substance use intervention** will be important to ensure the gains observed in the last three years are not lost in future years. Youth have benefited from these funds by reducing substance use, improving their psychosocial outcomes and reducing overall rates of re-offense since before receiving the Marijuana Tax funds.
- **Improved tracking of treatment needs and services** especially as they relate to youths' mental health. While youth overall seem to be receiving the needed assessments and treatment services, more youth are recorded as receiving mental health treatment than those that demonstrated a need on their diagnostic assessment. For this reason, it will be important to understand exactly what services are being tracked as mental health treatment and how or whether there is a need to more systematically track services that are in pursuit of mental health, but may not be treatment.
- **Continued collection of substance use data** will support programs and DCJ in understanding how services are decreasing youths' substance use. Prior to the Marijuana Tax Fund evaluation, no substance use data were collected. These data have provided an important understanding of the prevalence of youth substance use in diversion and the impact of diversion services on participating youth.
- **Identify opportunities to address differences between successful and unsuccessful youth.** For youth receiving Marijuana Tax-funded services, successful youth had significantly lower Risky Behavioral intentions and significantly higher self-esteem compared to youth who were unsuccessful in diversion. **Programs should identify specific opportunities to support youth in increasing self-esteem (mental health support) as well as reducing risky behaviors.**
- **Explore opportunities to engage family adults in diversion.** While only marginally significant ( $p=0.24$ ), connection to family adults tended to be lower for youth who were unsuccessful compared to those who were successful. Programs should explore opportunities to engage family adults when possible to increase the likelihood of youth's successful completion of diversion and ongoing youth success.

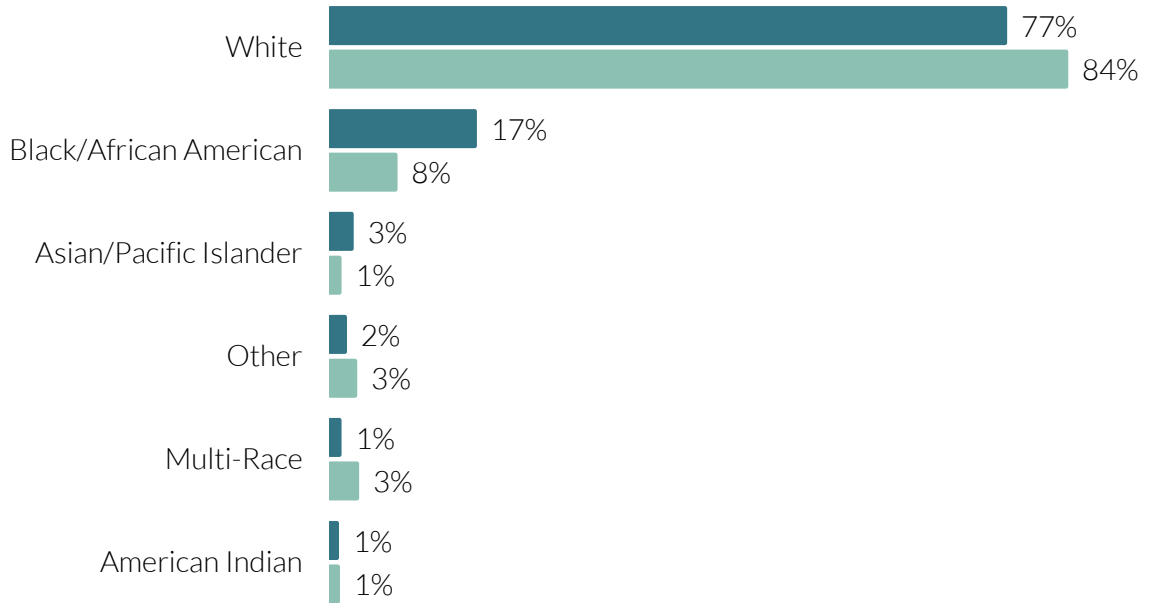


## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The DCJ evaluation included gender response options of male, female, transgender, gender queer, and gender neutral. Response options that resulted in 3 or fewer responses have been suppressed to maintain confidentiality for the youth and are not displayed in this report.

<sup>2</sup> The DCJ evaluation included race response options of American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African American, Multi-Racial, White, and Other. Response options that were represented by 5% or less of the responses were not displayed in the body of this report for ease of interpretation. The full set of responses are included here:

Race results of youth who **received MJ-funded services** and those with **no MJ-funded services**.



<sup>3</sup> Current school enrollment response options included actively enrolled in school (traditional or non-traditional), drop out, pursuing GED, Graduate/GED, Expelled (and not otherwise enrolled), and unknown.

School enrollment did not differ greatly between **youth who received MJ-funded services** and **youth with no MJ-funded services**.

