Marijuana Regulation and Enforcement Priorities for Cities

Changes in marijuana policy are gaining momentum throughout Los Angeles County, most notably with the passage of Prop 64, the Adult Use of Marijuana Act. Little is known about the impact these shifts will have on health systems, prevention and treatment of substance abuse, social outcomes such as education and professional achievement, and other disease prevalence. Proliferation of marijuana outlets, whether recreational or medical, has the potential for a serious negative impact on the health and safety of communities, and youth in particular.

As public health advocates, we are concerned with preventing health harm associated with marijuana use. The chief priority for protecting the health of LA County residents is preventing use of marijuana during the important developmental periods of childhood and adolescence. Marijuana is particularly risky for young people to use because it can interfere with brain development1 and has been shown to cause long-term deficits in cognitive function when use begins in adolescence2.

Comprehensive regulation is a crucial strategy for city leaders to prevent negative impacts from marijuana on youth. Despite California’s new marijuana laws, many areas of regulation are still under development. How can city residents and officials act now to ensure that local policies protect youth and preserve the character of our communities?

This document reviews proven strategies to limit youth access to marijuana by regulating marijuana dispensaries, personal use cultivation, commercial cultivation, and delivery services; it also outlines the potential impact of various policy options. The following matrix includes important information for local legislators concerned with enacting smart marijuana regulation that adequately protects youth in our communities.

Key Domains for Regulation

Storefront Marijuana Businesses

Restricting and carefully monitoring licenses and licensees: Licensing provisions that are actively enforced through regular random compliance checks in which violators, such as those that sell to minors, are subject to meaningful penalties (including license suspension and revocation) create a culture of compliance among marijuana licensees.

Restricting density of marijuana outlets: Decades of research on alcohol and tobacco use demonstrate the need for strong controls on the density of businesses, and research shows the physical availability of marijuana storefronts is similarly related to the prevalence and frequency of marijuana use (Freisthler & Gruenewald, 2014). Density restrictions on the number of businesses that can locate in a given area can prevent uneven clustering of marijuana outlets in our neighborhoods.

Restricting where marijuana storefronts can be located: Marijuana-related businesses should not be located near areas youth frequent such as schools, parks, and playgrounds. Similarly, locating marijuana businesses in mainstream shopping districts can increase perceptions among youth that marijuana is normal and socially acceptable, which has been shown to have strong associations with underage marijuana use (Ashbridge et al., 2016).

Personal Use Cultivation

Requiring licensing and inspections for cultivation: Current state laws regulating personal use cultivation lack basic requirements for security and preventing youth access. Ideally, property proposed as a site for personal use marijuana cultivation should be subject to an inspection and approval process, taking into account ways children may be exposed to the crop and other concerns, such as security from theft, visibility, water/electricity usage, the potential for nuisance from drifting odors, and the rights of property owners.

Commercial Cultivation

Restricting where marijuana storefronts can be located: The current State law is more comprehensive in regulations on commercial cultivation. However, it falls to city leaders to minimize the impacts of commercial cultivation on youth by restricting grow operations to non-residential zones and enforcing state regulations intended to prevent diversion of marijuana products to the black market.

1 = (Volkow et al., 2014)
2 = (Meier et al., 2015)
**Marijuana Policy Decision Matrix: Best Regulatory Practices for Minimizing Youth Harms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLICY DECISION</th>
<th>FACTORS TO CONSIDER</th>
<th>WHAT THE DATA SHOW</th>
<th>BEST PRACTICES TO MINIMIZE YOUTH IMPACTS</th>
<th>HOW TO ENFORCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Storefront Marijuana Businesses</td>
<td><strong>ALLOW</strong></td>
<td>• Density</td>
<td>• Limiting density reduces youth access and neighborhood impacts (Freisthler &amp; Gruenwald, 2014)</td>
<td>• Require conditional use permits contingent on passing an annual compliance review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Visibility</td>
<td>• Limiting visibility of outlets and advertising limits perceptions of social norms favoring marijuana use (D’Amico, Miles &amp; Tucker, 2015)</td>
<td>• Impose an annual renewal fee for conditional use permits to fund compliance inspections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Business practices</td>
<td>• Edibles present a higher risk of overdose and unintentional consumption by small children (McCoun &amp; Mello, 2015)</td>
<td>• Implement high visibility enforcement like drugged driving checkpoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• On-site use</td>
<td>• Strict security protocols limit theft and subsequent diversion to the black market (Subritsky, Pettigrew, &amp; Lenton, 2016)</td>
<td>• Take quick legal action against unlicensed or non-compliant outlets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Types of products</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Fine and hold accountable building owners for renting to an unlicensed marijuana outlet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Potency</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Use a portion of licensing fees to fund random inspections and responsible retailer training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Marketing</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Implement and locally publicize a Minor Decoy Program to evaluate compliance with age restrictions on marijuana sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Security requirements</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Educate law enforcement officers about the local policy and their role in enforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Drugged driving</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Educate residents about how to report unlicensed or non-compliant marijuana outlets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>DON'T ALLOW</strong></td>
<td>• Comprehensiveness</td>
<td>• States that prohibit retail marijuana storefronts experience lower increases in THC potency and prevalence of use (Pacula et al., 2015) even if they allow marijuana cultivation for personal use</td>
<td>• Educate law enforcement officers about the local policy and their role in enforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Enforceability</td>
<td>• Ensure the ordinance addresses all relevant marijuana activities, including cultivation and delivery (see sections below)</td>
<td>• Educate residents about how to report unlicensed or non-compliant marijuana outlets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**POLICY DECISION**

**Personal Use Cultivation**
- Allow
- Youth exposure
- Visibility
- Resource use
- Nuisance complaints
- Burglary
- How to monitor limits for water and energy consumption

**Commercial Cultivation**
- Allow
- Visability to youth
- Environmental impact
- Resource use (water/energy demand)
- Indoor versus outdoor cultivation
- Zoning restrictions

**Delivery Services**
- Allow
- Restrict to dispensaries licensed in your jurisdiction
- Restrict to registered collectives delivering to handicapped customers

**FACTORS TO CONSIDER**

**WHAT THE DATA SHOW**

**BEST PRACTICES TO MINIMIZE YOUTH IMPACTS**

**HOW TO ENFORCE**

- Educate residents about concerns like drifting odors, water and electricity use, and security from theft when practicing personal use cultivation

- Educate residents and local law enforcement about local policy
- Establish a procedure for residents to report non-compliant cultivation sites
- Establish a protocol for nuisance complaints, landlord/tenant disputes

- Communicate with senior managers to report violations of age restrictions or limits on quantity
- Use a Minor Decoy Program to evaluate delivery services’ compliance with age restrictions or limits on quantity
- Issue citations for verified deliveries to addresses within city limits
Delivery Services

Banning or limiting delivery services: Marijuana delivery services have been found to circumvent community efforts to regulate marijuana (Freisthler & Gruenwald, 2014) and present serious concerns for monitoring and enforcement of laws intended to prevent youth access and diversion to the black market.

Accountability

Enforcement resources will be made available to local jurisdictions to monitor and enforce marijuana regulations. As such, it falls to cities to define how they will monitor and enforce compliance on a local level.

High Visibility Enforcement

Highly visible enforcement is a deterrent to future violations of marijuana regulations. Enforcement techniques could include drugged driving checkpoints and publicizing use of a Minor Decoy Program that evaluates compliance with age restrictions. Consistent enforcement minimizes competition from non-compliant marijuana businesses, thus incentivizing compliance.

Community Involvement

To date, many local jurisdictions have relied heavily on reports and inquiries from residents to identify non-compliant or unlicensed marijuana businesses. City leaders can help by providing a helpline or similar resources to answer residents’ questions about local and state marijuana laws.

Training

Local law enforcement can be trained on local and state regulations regarding marijuana, on how to recognize and police drugged driving, and on how to evaluate security standards at commercial cultivation sites and marijuana storefronts.

About Rethinking Access to Marijuana

Rethinking Access to Marijuana (RAM) is a collaboration of public health professionals seeking to prevent marijuana-related harms by limiting youth access to marijuana in the County of Los Angeles.

This group was established with the vision of educating communities about the potential harms of marijuana use: implementing and evaluating environmental strategies formulated to limit youth access to marijuana; and influencing policy actions that support flourishing youth and communities free from marijuana-related harms. RAM neither supports nor opposes any specific legislation.

Contact RAM

Phone Number: (323) 815-7726
Email: LACountyRAM@gmail.com
Website: www.LACountyRAM.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/LACountyRAM
Twitter: www.twitter.com/LACountyRAM

References


CA Narcotics Officers Association, 2016. Personal communication with Sergeant Glen Walsh, April 2016.


Freisthler, B., & Gruenewald, P. J. (2014). Examining the relationship between the physical availability of medical marijuana and marijuana use across fifty California cities. Drug and alcohol dependence, 143, 244-250.


