



Medical Cannabis Patients Post-Legalization

Of the 39 medical cannabis states, 24 also allow adults who are 21 and older to use cannabis. As the below data shows, many — but not all — of those states have seen a substantial decrease in enrollment in medical cannabis programs post-legalization. This is likely because many patients prefer not to be on a government registry and to pay for a doctor’s certification when they have the option of using cannabis as an over-the-counter medicine.

While the number of patients enrolled in medical cannabis programs has declined in most legalization states, it has increased or held steady in two states. And in most mid-sized states with both medical cannabis and legalization laws, there are still tens of thousands of patients enrolled in medical cannabis programs. Some of the reasons patients remain in programs include:

- Medical cannabis is typically exempt from the excise taxes charged on adult-use cannabis, as it should be
- Some states have added legal protections for medical cannabis patients, such as against workplace discrimination
- Medical cannabis programs sometimes allow greater amounts of cannabis and/or higher potency cannabis products

It is important that adult-use cannabis laws be crafted in a way that recognizes these realities. Adult-use legalization states should allow medical businesses to convert to also serve adult-use consumers (many of whom will actually be the same patients) as long as they pay a fee and prioritize patients. They should also exempt medical cannabis from excise fees, which are inappropriate for a doctor-certified medicine, and ensure patients can access and use the products that work best for them.

| State | Adult-Use Sales Began | Patients Shortly Before Legal Sales Began | Most Recent Patient Count | Change In Patients Since Adult-Use Sales Began |
|--------------------|-----------------------|--|---|--|
| Arizona | Jan. 2021 | 295,295 | 88,598 | 70% decrease |
| Colorado | Jan. 2014 | 110,979 | 62,320 | 44% decrease |
| Connecticut | Jan. 2023 | 48,896 | 35,205 | 28% decrease |
| Illinois | Jan. 2020 | 54,479 patients made purchases. There were also 1,955 registered Opioid Alternative Pilot Program (OAPP) patients. | 56,127 patients made purchases. There were also 98 registered Opioid Alternative Pilot Program (OAPP) patients. | 3% increase |
| Maryland | July 2023 | 162,401 | 102,477 | 37% decrease |

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|----------------------|-----------------------|---|---------------------------|--|
| Massachusetts | Nov. 2018 | 48,265 | 91,758 | 90% increase |
| Michigan | Dec. 2019 | 271,332 | 79,022 | 71% decrease |
| Missouri | Feb. 2023 | 202,314 | 120,510 | 40% decrease |
| Montana | Jan. 2022 | 40,291 | 13,987 | 65% decrease |
| Nevada | July 2017 | 26,519 | 10,634 | 60% decrease |
| New Jersey | April 2022 | 126,454 | 66,678 | 47% decrease |
| New Mexico | April 2022 | 133,113 | 78,682 | 41% decrease |
| New York | Dec. 2022 | 124,000 | 97,922 | 21% decrease |
| Ohio | Aug. 2024 | 174,591 | 122,493 | 30% decrease |
| Oregon | Oct. 2015 | 72,715 | 13,625 | 81% decrease |
| Rhode Island | Dec. 2022 | 16,552 | 7,842 | 53% decrease |
| Vermont | Oct. 2022 | 4,302 | 2,707 | 37% decrease |

Note: This chart omits six adult-use legalization states. Alaska does not have medical cannabis sales — the state’s medical cannabis law only allows possession and home cultivation. California, Maine, and Washington do not have mandatory patient registries, so we cannot track changes. In the final two states, Delaware and Minnesota, adult-use sales have not begun as of this writing — in February 2025.