



## **The Problems with Colorado's Medical Marijuana Program and 18-20 Year Old Patients**

From our formation in 2013, One Chance to Grow Up has focused on the impact of marijuana legalization on kids. This focus has included tracking statistics on youth use, accessibility and perceptions of harm.

We believe the Colorado Medical Marijuana (MMJ) Program is a pipeline to our high schools and underage use of high potency marijuana.

As of February 2021, there are 3,979 Coloradans ages 18-20 that have access to medical marijuana via the Medical Marijuana Program. This number is 12.5% greater than February 2020 (3,536) prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

An 18 year old, who is often still in high school and has friends still in high school, can obtain a MMJ card without parental notification. The card enables an 18 YO to purchase double the amount of marijuana (2oz), including significantly more highly potent THC concentrates and marijuana edibles. The legal age for recreational use of marijuana is 21 in Colorado.

Since October 2020, One Chance to Grow Up has made a series of information requests to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE).

Based on CDPHE's responses (attached), as well as from the publicly available monthly statistics of the medical marijuana registry, we are able to identify the following concerning trends.

- Hundreds of teens register for a MMJ card when they turn 18. There are approximately 70X more 18 years olds with a MMJ card compared to 17 year olds. In February 2021, there were so few 17 YO with a MMJ card that CDPHE suppressed the data while the number explodes to 744 18 YO with a MMJ card
- Medical marijuana tele-medicine (permitted under pandemic executive order in March 2020) resulted in increase in 18-20 YO patients at a rate 58% higher than among the entire registry for an absolute increase of 10.6% between March 2020 and February 2021 (total registry increased 6.7%)
- 2 in 5 18-20 YO patients (1,549 of 3979) list the subjective, unverifiable qualifying condition of severe pain as their only qualifying condition in February 2021
- 74 providers wrote a recommendation for a 18-20 YO patient with only the subjective, unverifiable condition of severe pain as their only qualifying condition
- 42 providers have written more than 50 recommendations for the vulnerable 18-20 YO population in the past 2 years
- Providers who wrote 50 or more recommendations for 18-20 YO are more likely to prescribe for severe pain than physicians who wrote less than 10 recommendations (83% v. 53%)
- Only 1 in 3 providers who write marijuana recommendations have recommended it to an 18-20 YO patient in the past 2 years (144 of 423)
- 40 18-20 patients have extended plant counts, 1% of the 18-20 YO
- Less than 10 providers wrote recommendations for extended plant counts for 18-20 YO

- Over 1,800 recommendations were written for severe nausea among 18–20 YO over a two year period and only 51 for cancer. While marijuana can be a treatment for nausea caused by some conditions such as cancer treatment, it can also be a cause for nausea with cannabis hyperemesis syndrome, a condition increasingly diagnosed in our hospitals.

Although it is clear that only a portion of providers who recommend medical marijuana recommend it for the vulnerable 18–20 YO segment, it is vitally important to offer these providers continuing medical education and support regarding the latest science on today’s marijuana and risks to teens and young adults.

As the MMJ Program is presently regulated by CDPHE, it is impossible to gain assurance that the providers who are recommending a drug to these vulnerable 18–20 YO are fully equipped to assess the risks before making the recommendation. Are they experts in their field? Do they know how marijuana impacts the developing brain? Do they have an ongoing relationship with their 18–20 patients to monitor for signs of abuse?

Confidentiality is written into Amendment 20 around providers, so CDPHE denied our request for the following information:

- The identity of recommending providers
- Practice areas of these providers
- Business addresses of these providers

Amendment 20 was written as a defense against criminal prosecution. It did not contain a structure for commercial sales. The laws governing medical marijuana stores were enacted years later. The provider confidentiality rules are outdated and misapplied in the context of commercial sales of medical

marijuana. Physician confidentiality/anonymity is NOT standard for the prescribing of Schedule II drugs with a high potential for abuse and should not be standard for recommending medical marijuana.

## **Attached Custom Data Request Response of CDPHE**



## Medical Marijuana Registry data

### Custom data request

Prepared for and requested by

From:

Date:

### Request

The following for all physicians who have recommended marijuana to a patient 18-20 since 2014:

- # of recommendations made - see table 3.
- Conditions for which they recommended marijuana - see table 4.
- # of times they recommended marijuana per condition - see table 5.
- Medical provider name - confidential and cannot be released.
- Medical provider area of practice or specialty - we do not collect this information.
- City of practice - cannot release due to small counts and geographic size.

The following information for Feb. 2021:

- # of medical marijuana cards held by patients aged 17-21. Data for 17 year olds will not be released due to small patient count in the 10-17 age group - see table 1.
- # patients 18-20 have a recommendation with only severe pain as their medical condition - see section 1.
- # of providers wrote the recommendations for patients only with severe pain - see section 1.
- # of patients 18-20 with a recommendation for extended plant count - see table 2
- # of providers that wrote the recommendations for extended plant counts for patients 18-20. Suppressed due to the small count of patients with extended plant counts.

Some of the data that was originally requested, such as medical provider names and city of practice, cannot be released because it is confidential or because the counts and geographic areas were too small to release in a manner that maintains confidentiality of Registry information.

Other data, like physician specialty area of practice, cannot be released because it is not collected by the Medical Marijuana Registry. The only data available prior to March 2019 is what is publicly published on the Registry's monthly statistics webpage. This is due to the Registry's record retention schedule.

The right hand column in table 3 and left hand column in table 5 do not represent ages. They represent the number of recommendations that were written by providers. All data in both tables refers to patients 18-20. Treat these tables separately.

The Registry does due diligence to release data in a way that maintains confidentiality. As such, groupings and ranges may vary based on the data that is being requested.

**Section 1**  
**Patient data Feb. 2021**

**Patients per age group Feb. 2021**

The table below shows the number of registered patients in each age group in Feb. 2021.

- There were a total of 87,216 patients on the Registry.
- The 18-20 year old age group made up 4.56%

**Table 1**

Age	Number of patients
18	744
19	1,549
20	1,686
21	1,488

**Patients aged 18-20 with a recommendation for only severe pain in Feb. 2021**  
1,549

**Extended plant counts recommendations for patients aged 18-20 in Feb. 2021**

The table below shows plant count recommendations for Feb. 2021.

**Table 2**

Recommended plant count	Number of patients	Percent of patients
1 to 6	3,939	99%
7 to 10	suppressed	suppressed
11 to 25	23	0.58%
26 to 50	suppressed	suppressed
51 to 75	suppressed	suppressed
76 to 100	suppressed	suppressed

*\*Counts of 10 and fewer have been suppressed to help protect patient confidentiality.*

**Section 2  
Provider data**

**Providers that recommended medical marijuana for patients aged 18-20 and Feb. 2021**

- Out of 423 total providers, 144 recommended medical marijuana for at least one patient between the ages of 18-20.
- The 18-20 age group represents only 5.5% written for all age groups within this time frame.

The following table shows the number of providers who recommended medical marijuana for patients between the ages of 18-20 and how many recommendations they made within this specific age range.

**Table 3**

# of providers who recommended for patients 18-20 years old	# of recommendations written for patients 18-20 years old
11	200 or more
14	100 - 199
17	50 - 99
25	11 - 49
77	0 - 10

*\*Counts of 10 and fewer have been suppressed to help protect patient confidentiality.*



**Recommendations by medical condition**

The table below shows the number of recommendations for each medical condition between March 2019 and Feb. 2021. It is important to note that providers can recommend for more than one medical condition.

**Table 4**

Medical Condition	Number of Recommendations
Severe Pain	7,775
Severe Nausea	1,837
Persistent Muscle Spasms	1,297
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	1,284
Recommending marijuana in lieu of an opioid	576
Seizures	262
Cachexia	176
Autism Spectrum Disorder	122
Cancer	51
Glaucoma	15
HIV or AIDS Positive	*

*\*Counts of 10 and fewer have been suppressed to help protect patient confidentiality.*

**Recommendation frequency per medical condition between March 2019 and Feb. 2021**

The table below shows the number of providers, number of recommendations, and medical conditions for patients 18-20.

**Table 5**

	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Cachexia	Cancer	Glaucoma	HIV or AIDS Positive	Persistent Muscle Spasms	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	Recommendation in lieu of an opioid	Seizures	Severe Nausea	Severe Pain
Providers that wrote 1-9 recommendations	45	25	24	12	*	42	70	44	40	46	41
Providers that wrote 10-49 recommendations	*	*	*	*	*	16	21	*	*	24	21
Providers that wrote 50 or more recommendations	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	35

*Counts of 10 or fewer have been suppressed.*