

Legalization of Adult-Use Cannabis

Peoria County Board of Health identifies key priorities and concerns in efforts to legalize adult-use cannabis

The Peoria County Board of Health has identified key priorities to consider in the implementation of any legalization of cannabis.

The Peoria County Board of Health recognizes that current efforts within the State of Illinois are in process to begin legalization of cannabis for adult usage. While there is limited data on the impact cannabis usage has on the health, safety and economy of a community, the Board of Health does recognize the importance for open communication and transparent decision-making to assist in framing appropriate legislation.

This position statement is neither an affirmation nor a dissention on the State of Illinois's decision to legalize adult-use cannabis, but rather a response to the current legislative climate.

Through a strategic approach of education and policy, the Board of Health believes that as a community we should leverage resources through state legislation and local ordinances to appropriately address concerns and control any unwarranted effects legalization may have on the health of our community.

Recommended Priorities & Concerns

The Peoria County Board of Health recommends the implementation of the following strategies to establish cannabis use prevention and control to decrease adverse impacts of cannabis within Peoria County.

- **Protect youth and vulnerable populations;** legalization efforts should support laws that eliminate access, raise the minimum age to 21 years, and educate youth on the importance of abstaining from usage. In addition, focused education on the impacts of use and exposure during pre-pregnancy and prenatal stages of health.
- **Community investment;** funding regardless if collected through the licensing and regulation of cannabis should support programming that directly impacts communities that have historically been negatively affected by the “war on drugs”. This includes K-12 public school funding, community police programing, and built-environment improvements. In addition, these grants should not be limited to Chicago and suburban counties but be distributed throughout the State of Illinois.
- **Timely data reporting and surveillance;** to better stay informed and monitor impacts of legalization, a timely reporting of overdoses and injuries related to cannabis needs to be in place along with routine surveillance of youth usage and perceptions.
- **Planning and zoning;** to improve equity, set-back distances from schools, childcare, and other venues should be supported and density limits on the number of store fronts within population and low socio-economic zones. In addition, bring forward smoke-free requirements to decrease secondhand exposure.

- **Marketing and labeling;** legislation proposed should clearly define similar marketing limitation and labeling requirements as utilized within tobacco products. Specifically restrict marketing that targets children, require warning labels/graphics, and prohibit using non-peer reviewed research claims on the health effects of cannabis.
- **Substance use treatment;** funding regardless of cannabis related revenues should be set aside to for the primary focus on treatment to address substance use disorder and support higher education programs to assist in supporting the education and professional workforce for providers.
- **Capacity building and research;** funding and support the utilization of state laboratories and research centers to assist in developing testing and research on the impacts of cannabis and potency of cannabis.
- **Promote social justice;** includes reducing cannabis related incarceration and working to expunge past criminal convictions for non-violent cannabis-related crimes.
- **Standardized THC potency;** supporting a defined threshold to assist in safety regulations and workforce policies.
- **Workforce Policy** – support guidance on interpretation of federal and state mandates, specifically considerations on funding and implications of medical usage not supported by federal agencies. In addition, legal assistance in updating professional regulations to address issues of workplace policies, impacts on health insurance benefits, and employment law.

Background

The 1970's Controlled Substances Act created a federal law in which the use and possession of cannabis is illegal, including for medical purposes. As of May 1, 2019; 33 states including the District of Columbia allow for medical use of cannabis, and 10 states and DC have gone further in legalizing adult-usage (Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Colorado, Michigan, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Maine).

In 2016, the Peoria County Board of Health adopted a three-year Community Health Needs Assessment and Improvement Plan (CHNA/CHIP). One of the key health priorities identified was Behavioral Health, specifically mental health and substance use. According to the Illinois Youth Survey, in 2018, 10% of 8th graders and 29% of 12th graders reported smoking marijuana within the last year. It is important to note that not all school districts are required to participate in the ILYS and of the 50 schools within Peoria County only 15 participated in the survey, of which two were from Peoria Public School District.

During the 2018, Illinois Governor's election, the topic of legalization of adult-use cannabis was a platform discussed by both candidates. While there is interest in the possible revenue generation this enterprise would bring to the state, additional areas of interest include social justice and public health.

The Peoria City/County Health Department's mission and vision focuses on promoting health, preventing disease, and providing a safe environment through the education, engagement and collaboration.

References

1. Public Health Equity Framework, Illinois Public Health Institute.
2. Tri-County Community Health Needs Assessment and Improvement Plan.
3. Getting it Right from the Start, CA Initiative on Regulation of Recreational Marijuana.
4. Illinois Youth Survey