



Research Brief Cannabis Consumption Sites

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LCB Research Program

The Research Program at the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (LCB) is a non-partisan, transparent resource focused on public health and safety outcomes related to the products, policy, and regulation of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and vapor products.

Purpose

Cannabis consumption sites have been a recent topic of discussion among cannabis regulators in the U.S. and Canada. Although cannabis consumption sites are not currently allowed in Washington State, LCB leadership, cannabis trade organizations, medical cannabis communities, and public health partners have expressed interest and concern related to consumption sites. This brief is based on a review of existing evidence including scientific literature, government reports, regulations and policies, and other credible information sources.

This document does not represent an official position of LCB.

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For more information about the Research Program and its work, please visit: lcb.wa.gov/research_program.

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Background

Although cannabis is legal in most U.S. states for either medical or non-medical use, cannabis use is generally restricted to private residences. The concept of allowing cannabis to be consumed in regulated spaces—like bars for alcohol—has become increasingly popular over the past decade.

The term “cannabis consumption site” is commonly used to describe licensed locations where adults can legally consume cannabis in a public setting.¹⁻⁴ Additional terms for consumption sites include:

- *On-site consumption;*
- *Consumption lounges;*
- *Cannabis lounges;*
- *Cannabis clubs;* and
- *Cannabis cafés.*

“Social consumption” is a broader term that describes any setting in which people consume cannabis together.

Potential Benefits

There are several potential benefits of allowing cannabis consumption sites. Consumption sites may allow people living at properties that prohibit cannabis use (e.g., multi-unit or public housing complexes) to have a legal location to consume medical or non-medical cannabis. On-site consumption may also promote cannabis tourism and consumerism which can have positive influences on local economies.⁵ Another rationale is the potential for consumption sites to be a low-cost point-of-entry into the cannabis market for licensees as they may require less up-front investment than other types of cannabis

businesses.¹⁻⁴ This has been a particular selling point for advocacy efforts looking to increase cannabis market participation for those most affected by the war on drugs.

In addition, like other substances, cannabis is regularly used socially with other people. For example, a recent survey of Washington state cannabis consumers found that 57% typically used cannabis with friends.⁶ Research suggests that people who use cannabis with other people generally have a lower risk of developing cannabis use problems relative to people using alone.⁷⁻⁹ Providing a space that encourages social use, rather than solitary use, may reduce harm for some users.

Potential Risks

There are also several risks to cannabis consumption sites including air quality. Smoking, vaping, and dabbing cannabis releases aerosols including fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), which can penetrate deep into the lungs and is associated with several negative health outcomes such as heart attacks.¹⁰⁻¹³ One study from California measured PM_{2.5} continuously for five weeks in a retail store with on-site consumption of vaping and dabbing (but not smoking). The levels of PM_{2.5} were 28 times higher during working hours than when the retail store was closed. These concentrations were comparable to indoor spaces that allow cigarette smoking and were high enough to cause health problems for both employees and customers.¹²⁻¹³ Other studies have highlighted that ventilation cannot fully eliminate exposure to indoor air

pollutants and their associated health impacts.^{11,13}

Impaired driving is another risk of cannabis consumption sites. Cannabis use impairs the cognitive and psychomotor skills needed to drive safely.¹⁴ Limited research exists, however, as to whether the legalization of cannabis consumption sites may increase rates of driving under the influence.

Cannabis consumption sites that are near businesses that serve alcohol may also increase rates of co-use (use of both substances at the same time). Using both alcohol and cannabis generally increases risk of harm and may worsen public health and safety issues, including driving under the influence of both substances.¹⁵⁻¹⁷

In addition, normalizing cannabis use among youth and other vulnerable populations is also a concern.^{10,18}

Perceptions of Cannabis Consumption Sites in the U.S.

Social acceptability of cannabis use has generally increased over time in the U.S.¹⁹⁻²⁰ According to the 2023 International Cannabis Policy Study (ICPS), about 1 in 5 respondents in the U.S. reported feeling 'comfortable' or 'very comfortable' using cannabis in public.²¹ The ICPS results also show that about 40% of Washington state respondents, regardless of cannabis user status, stated they think cannabis consumption sites should be allowed in their state. Among past-year cannabis users, about 50% of respondents said they would visit a cannabis consumption

site if they were allowed in Washington, 24% would not visit a site, and 21% might visit a site.²¹

U.S. State Regulations

Cannabis consumption sites are relatively new in the U.S. In 2019, The Original Cannabis Café was the first site to open in West Hollywood, California.²² Since then, regulation and implementation of consumption sites has become increasingly common.

There are currently 13 states that authorize adult-use cannabis consumption sites with varying levels of regulation (**Table 1**). There are three primary categories of consumption site licenses:

- 1) An additional privilege that can be added to an existing retail license;
- 2) A separate, distinct, on-site consumption license; and
- 3) A special events license that temporarily allows on-site consumption (e.g., during a festival).^{1-4, 23-38}

Depending on the state, licenses may allow cannabis sales and on-site consumption, or they may only allow on-site consumption and customers must bring their own cannabis product.

Cannabis consumption sites are typically authorized at the state level, and then local jurisdictions (i.e., counties and cities) may opt in. Local governments may include additional rules and requirements for consumption sites in their jurisdiction.^{1-4,23-38}

Current state regulations for consumption sites often include the following:

- Smoking and vaping cannabis is allowed both indoors and outdoors, with ventilation requirements for indoors;
- Sale or consumption of alcohol and/or tobacco is prohibited;
- Sale, preparation, and consumption of food is allowed; some states require consumption sites be part of food retail businesses, while others allow sales of pre-packaged food and drink;
- Prevention of impaired driving, such as having a 24-hour no-tow policy and discounted rideshare offers;
- Following state zoning restrictions is required; and
- Visibility restrictions that shield cannabis use from public view are required.^{1-4,23-38}

Notably, each state has unique restrictions and/or allowances. For example:

- Colorado and Nevada have both retail and distinct on-site license types; Colorado also allows a mobile option (e.g., cannabis consumption bus);
- Illinois authorizes cannabis consumption sites at either cannabis and/or tobacco retail stores;
- Maryland only allows smoking cannabis outdoors; vaporization is allowed indoors;
- Minnesota only allows on-site consumption of infused drinks and edible products (special events may allow smoking);

- Missouri does not have a state licensing structure, but local jurisdictions may authorize consumption sites; and
- New York is the only state that has zoning restrictions specific to consumption sites.^{1-4,23-38}

Ventilation Requirements

Since smoking and vaping is common within cannabis consumption sites, these sites can conflict with smoke-free air laws that prohibit smoking in shared public air spaces.¹⁰⁻¹¹

Although some jurisdictions may allow consumption sites to bypass clean indoor air laws (e.g., CO), states often have several requirements related to ventilation.³⁹

For example:

- Alaska only allows smoking if the retailer is freestanding (i.e., not attached to another building); for indoor smoking, there must also be a smoke-free area employees can monitor, and a ventilation system;
- Colorado's mobile units (e.g., cannabis consumption bus) must have separate ventilation for the driver's area;
- Illinois only allows smoking in a specifically designated area with a locked door separating it from other areas;
- Michigan requires a smoke-free area for employees to monitor the consumption area and a ventilation system; and
- Nevada requires indoor smoking to be in a separate room, an approved ventilation plan, and minimal employee presence; employees must be provided personal protective equipment (e.g., KN95 facemasks).^{1-4,23-38}

Despite these ventilation requirements, the regulations vary greatly by state.

Best Practices

Several public health and safety recommendations have been proposed for cannabis consumption lounges, and a detailed outline of recommendations was created by the Nevada Cannabis Advisory Committee.⁴⁰

Air Quality

- Confine all indoor cannabis smoking, dabbing, and vaping to a designated smoking room;
- Implement measures to reduce the risk of air pollution from the designated smoking room entering other parts of the building including:
 - Partitions separating the smoking room from the rest of the building;
 - Self-closing, sealed doors;
 - Exhaust hoods over seating areas;
 - Separate HVAC system;
 - Direct exhaust to the outdoors;
 - Air filtration system; and
 - Freestanding buildings to avoid affecting neighboring properties.
- Mandate work protocols and air quality standards to minimize employees' secondhand smoke exposure including:
 - Monitoring air quality;
 - Minimizing employee time in smoking areas;
 - Allowing employees to monitor the smoking room from a smoke-free room; and
 - Providing personal protective equipment.

- Do not allow tobacco smoking/nicotine vaping in lounges.

Health Notices

- Provide health notices and disclosures like other cannabis products (e.g., edibles) including health risk warnings.

Occupational Health

- Require lounges to monitor and report employee illnesses;
- Require employees to obtain cannabis safety training and certification;
- Require posting of employee health policies; and
- Provide a written plan for instructions on how to address potentially dangerous scenarios including overconsumption, sexual assault, and attempts to drive while intoxicated.

Public Safety

- Restrict entry to people 21+ years of age;
- Provide a cannabis certification training program;
- Require reporting of medical incidents related to cannabis consumption;
- Require a mitigation plan to prevent impaired driving;
- Require signage include age restriction and other warnings;
- Require the display and consumption of cannabis to be kept out of plain sight; and
- Require sales limits.³⁹

Serving Options

- Include low-dose cannabis options (e.g., <2mg per serving); and
- Provide water and food options.

Additional Research Needs

Due to public health and safety concerns about cannabis consumption sites and the increasing authorization of these sites, more research is needed to fully understand their impacts. Potential research could include assessment of:

- Cannabis use behaviors in consumption sites (e.g., type and level of consumption compared to home/private use);
- Long-term exposure to secondhand cannabis smoke and vapor among employees and customers in and around consumption sites;
- Effectiveness of indoor air ventilation systems such as vent hood or fume hoods;
- Monitoring and reporting of adverse health events at cannabis consumption sites (among customers and staff);
- Public perception of the community impact of consumption sites;
- Long-term compliance with existing cannabis regulations including underage access;
- Economic impacts of consumption sites over time and by license type; and
- Rates of vehicle crashes and DUI violations near or originating from consumption sites.

Table 1. Summary of state cannabis consumption site regulations.^{1-4,23-38}

State	License Type(s)	Smoking	Alcohol	Tobacco	Food
Alaska	Retail with on-premise designation	Indoor and outdoor	No	No	Yes
California	Retail with on-premise designation; special events	Indoor and outdoor	No	No	Yes
Colorado	Distinct (consumption only which includes a mobile option) and retail with consumption; special events	Indoor and outdoor	No	No	Yes
Illinois	Retail with on-premise designation (cannabis or tobacco retail stores)	Indoor and outdoor	No	Yes (retail tobacco stores)	N/A
Maryland	Retail with on-premise designation; special events (pending)	Outdoor only (vaping allowed indoor)	No	No	N/A
Massachusetts	Retail with on-premise designation; distinct; special events (pending)	Indoor and outdoor	No	No	Yes
Michigan	Distinct (adjacent to a retailer or consumption only)	Indoor and outdoor	No	No	Yes
Minnesota	Retail with on-premise designation (cannabis microbusinesses); special events	Only at events; Endorsed areas may have infused drinks and food products.	No	No	Yes
Missouri	No state licensing (counties and cities may authorize)	Indoor and outdoor	N/A	N/A	Yes
Nevada	Retail with on-premise designation and distinct	Indoor and outdoor	No	No	Yes
New Jersey	Retail with on-premise designation (pending)	Indoor and outdoor	No	No	No
New Mexico	Retail with on-premise designation	Indoor and outdoor	No	Yes	Yes
New York	Distinct (pending)	Indoor and outdoor	N/A	N/A	N/A

Pending = state has authorized or is in the process of authorizing cannabis consumption sites, but has not yet awarded licenses

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