



Marijuana Regulation and Enforcement Priorities for Cities

Changes in marijuana policy are gaining momentum throughout Los Angeles County. Yet, 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. As of January 2016, California has new medical marijuana regulations, yet many areas of regulation are still under development. There is also the possibility that legal recreational marijuana use will become a reality in the near future. 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 medical 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**.

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 medical marijuana dispensaries is similarly related to the prevalence and frequency of marijuana use (Ammerman et al., 2015). 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.

Key Domains for Regulation

Storefront Marijuana Businesses

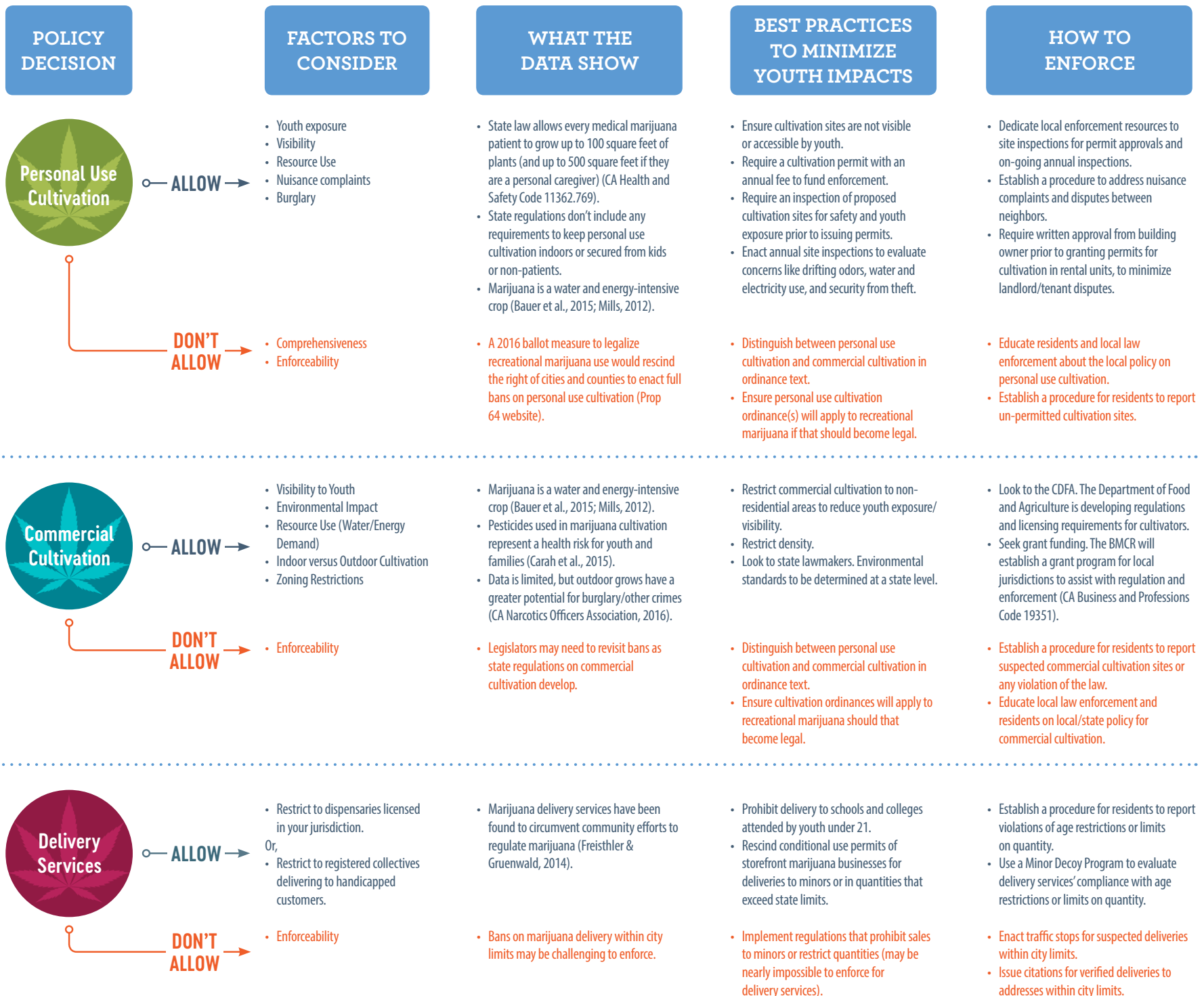
Restricting and carefully monitoring licenses and licensees: Licensing provisions that are actively enforced through regular random compliance checks in which violators, such as those that sell to minors, are subject to meaningful penalties (including license suspension and revocation) create a culture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

1 = (Volkow et al., 2014)

2 = (Meier et al., 2015)

Medical Marijuana Policy Decision Matrix: Best Regulatory Practices for Minimizing Youth Harms





Delivery Services

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



Accountability

The current State law is unclear about what enforcement resources will be made available to local jurisdictions to monitor and enforce medical 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 medical marijuana regulations. Enforcement techniques could include drugged driving checkpoints and publicizing use of a Minor Decoy Program that evaluates compliance with age restrictions.

Community Involvement

To date, many local jurisdictions have relied heavily on reports and inquiries from residents to identify non-compliant or unlicensed marijuana businesses.

Training

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

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