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What Does Medical Cannabis Access Look Like Now

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We've come a long way since 1996, when California became the first US state to legalize medical cannabis. Nowadays, most US states allow citizens to consume cannabis for medical purposes, and around half allow recreational consumption as well.

According to recent data, there are over 4.1 million enrolled patients in medical cannabis programs across the country. Still, this doesn't tell us much about how easy it is to find and access medical professionals who feel comfortable recommending it.

We did the research, and here's what you need to know about medical cannabis access in the US today.

More States are Joining In

As of 2024, **38 states, plus D.C. and three territories**, allow for cannabis to be used for medical purposes through comprehensive programs, and 47 states allow the use of medical cannabis in general.

New programs launched quite recently (like the one in Kentucky) and major upgrades in states like Texas (expanding qualifying conditions and dosage limits) continue to broaden the legal patient base.

States are continually adding conditions, with chronic pain, TBI, Crohn's disease, and terminal/hospice care being increasingly included, opening up the program to more patients. Also, recent discoveries show **cannabis may be useful for hormone health** as well, so the list of conditions is bound to expand.

Telehealth was a Game-Changer

Nowadays, you can get your medical cannabis evaluation over telehealth in many states. Patients can obtain or renew their medical cannabis card certification entirely online via a HIPAA-compliant platform like **marijuanadoctors.com**.

Here, you can schedule a remote appointment with a licensed doctor, verify qualifying conditions, and identify dispensaries near your location. Overall, telehealth made this process a lot smoother than it used to be.

Plus, it solved the access problem for rural patients and those in small towns. Medical cannabis clinics and certifying physicians often cluster in major metropolitan areas, which meant little to no options for those who didn't live nearby.

Medical Dispensaries are Everywhere

Finding a medical cannabis dispensary in the US is generally quite easy, especially if you live in one of the states with a comprehensive medical cannabis program.

There are nearly 15,000 cannabis dispensaries operating across the United States, and recent data indicates that the most Americans now live in a county with at least one cannabis dispensary.

But you're quite lucky if you live in states on the West Coast, the Northeast, plus Michigan, Oklahoma, and Colorado.

It's important to know that, in states that are medical-only, you must first register and obtain a valid medical cannabis patient card (or equivalent documentation) before you can legally purchase products from a licensed medical dispensary.

Medical vs. Recreational Cannabis

While there are states that legalize both medical and adult-use cannabis, the medical type is more common and easily accessible.

Some states reserve higher potency products (especially concentrates/edibles with higher THC content) exclusively for medical patients. Also, medical dispensaries often carry a wider variety of specialized products with specific cannabinoid ratios (like high-CBD/low-THC formulas) geared toward therapeutic use.

Then there's the quality issue. Medical cannabis programs are generally required to adhere to stricter testing standards for contaminants, pesticides, and potency consistency than recreational products, ensuring a medical-grade standard for patients.

Finally, there's the tax differential. Recreational cannabis is typically subject to significantly higher excise, sales, and local taxes than medical cannabis, leading to substantial cost savings for registered patients.

While the price of legal cannabis has generally dropped in many markets, medical patients often benefit from lower overall retail prices and/or loyalty programs not available to recreational consumers.

In Summary

While there's still more work to do on both the law and access front, medical cannabis is a lot more accessible nowadays. Science is also keeping pace, looking into additional health benefits that have not yet been discovered or acknowledged. Overall, the future is pretty bright on this front.

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