

**Title 18**  
**Chapter 86**  
***Therapeutic Use of Cannabis***  
**2013 Annual Report**



Prepared by:

**Marijuana for Symptom Relief  
Oversight Committee**

March 17, 2014  
Waterbury, Vermont

# 2013 Annual Report on the Therapeutic Use of Cannabis

## INTRODUCTION

During the 2011 Session the legislature requested the Marijuana for Symptom Relief Oversight Committee generate a report for the purpose of evaluating and making recommendations to the general assembly. Act 65 (S.17) specified that the report should include:

(A) The ability of qualifying patients and registered caregivers in all areas of the state to obtain timely access to marijuana for symptom relief.

(B) The effectiveness of the registered dispensaries individually and together in serving the needs of qualifying patients and registered caregivers, including the provision of educational and support services.

(C) Sufficiency of the regulatory and security safeguards contained in this subchapter and adopted by the department of public safety to ensure that access to and use of cultivated marijuana is provided only to cardholders authorized for such purposes.

## ANALYSIS

Pursuant to the legislature's report specifications the following analysis is presented.

### **(A) The ability of qualifying patients and registered caregivers in all areas of the state to obtain timely access to marijuana for symptom relief.**

Registered patients and caregivers who have designated a dispensary can typically schedule an appointment within 24 to 48 hours from when a patient calls. The average driving distance from the largest towns in each county to the closest dispensary is 38 miles, excluding three counties that have dispensaries located in their largest towns/cities. While dispensaries are geographically distributed throughout the state, access is limited for a subset of the population living in remote communities or those with limited transportation options. There are approximately 30 patients that reside over 100 miles from their designated dispensary. Satellite offices, delivery and/or the authorization of additional dispensaries, no more than two, would aid patient access in underserved areas of the state.

For reference a map depicting the location of the four dispensaries and population density throughout the state is provided in Attachment 1. Additionally, Attachment 2 summarizes the percentage of patients that have designated a dispensary by county.

### **(B) The effectiveness of the registered dispensaries individually and together in serving the needs of qualifying patients and registered caregivers, including the provision of educational and support services.**

Currently, the Department of Public Safety has issued three registration certificates to

dispensaries operating throughout the state. They are located in Burlington, Brandon and Montpelier. The fourth and final certificate has been conditionally awarded and the Department will issue a final registration certificate once the dispensary has met all requirements set forth by rule and pass an inaugural inspection. Assuming all requirements are met, the fourth dispensary will be located in Brattleboro and is scheduled to open in February<sup>1</sup>.

Currently the dispensaries offer a variety of Indica, Sativa and Hybrid strains of marijuana for symptom relief. Besides offering dried flower the dispensaries are offering patients smokeless options such as tinctures, edibles, infused oils, teas, salves and liniments. The dispensaries have been responsive to special patient needs by developing non-alcohol based tinctures, gluten free, and low calorie edibles for example. Dispensaries have also taken steps to serve patients by adjusting appointment schedules to fit their needs.

The Vermont Patients Alliance dispensary, located in Montpelier, manages a laboratory and offers testing services to all dispensaries. Gas chromatography is used to analyze different cannabinoids within each strain tested, including Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), Cannabidiol (CBD) and Cannabinol (CBN). This information allows dispensaries to ensure consistency in their products for potency and purity, two factors essential for ensuring patient safety and reliable medicine. Champlain Valley Dispensary is scheduled to open a laboratory as well, utilizing a separate chromatography method.

Additionally, dispensaries have worked together by bartering plants for laboratory services and displayed a willingness to share specialty strains for patient benefit. These strains, developed through innovative breeding projects, provide beneficial symptom relief to different patient populations.

Dispensaries have been able to effectively provide educational and support services for registered patients by performing these services during scheduled appointments. In addition to face-to-face consultations, dispensaries have handouts available to patients for reference at a later date in conjunction with informational websites. Topics covered through educational services include effects of different marijuana strains, proper dosage for different modes of administration, information on tolerance, dependence, withdrawal, and substance abuse signs and symptoms.

The Committee recommends, in addition to current labeling requirements of dispensed marijuana, language regarding impairment and potential side effects should be required. The Committee furthermore, recommends standardization among the dispensaries concerning survey data, educational handouts, testing and calibration requirements.

**(C) Sufficiency of the regulatory and security safeguards contained in this subchapter and adopted by the department of public safety to ensure that access to and use of cultivated marijuana is provided only to cardholders authorized for such purposes.**

The current regulatory and security safeguards contained in statute and rules adopted by the Department of Public Safety have been demonstrated to be largely effective in ensuring only registered patients and caregivers access and use cultivated marijuana for symptom relief. This past year has been ground-breaking for Vermont with the

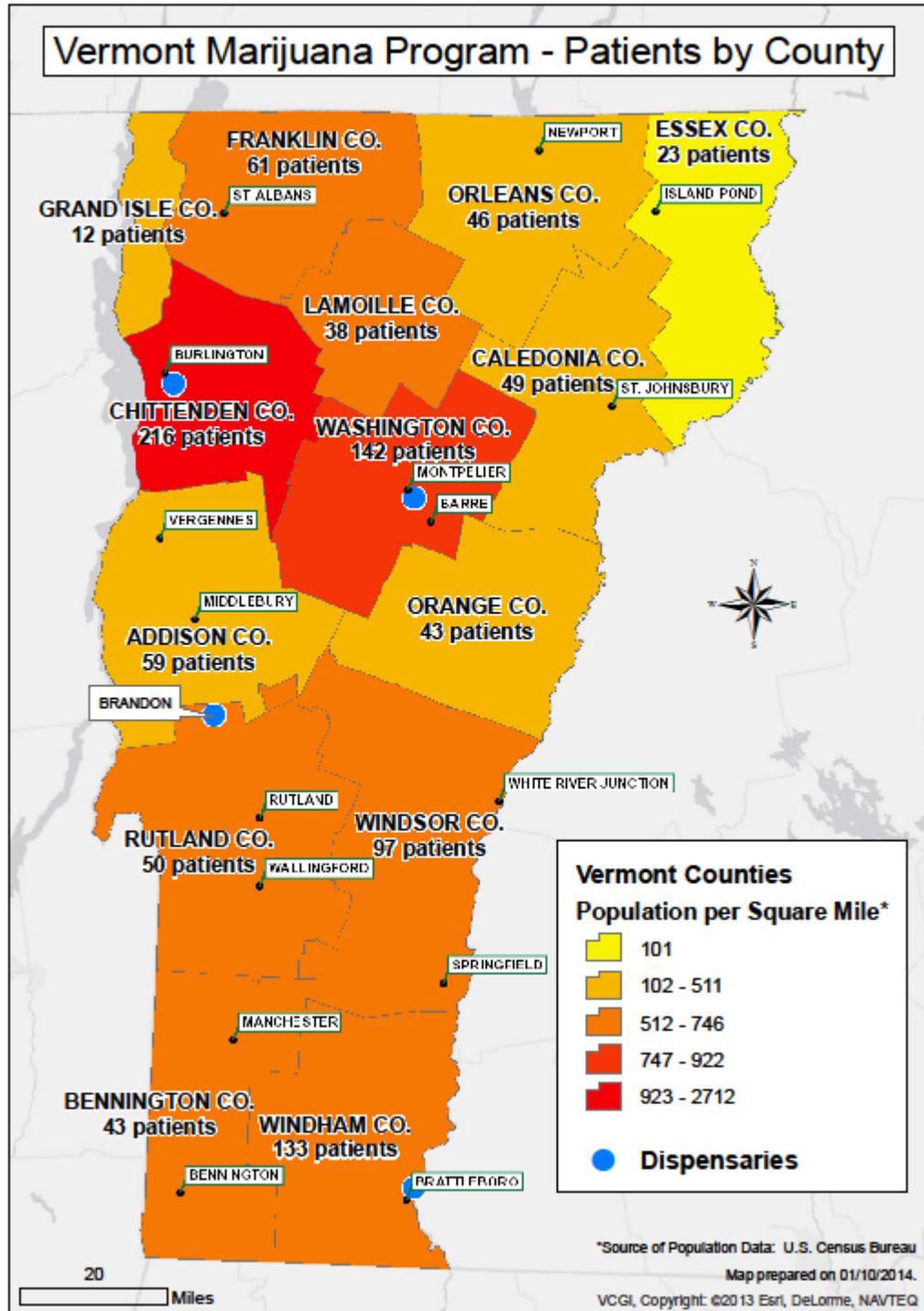
establishment of three dispensaries to serve the needs of patients<sup>1</sup>; this has come with both challenges and achievements as to be expected with any new program. However, Vermont has progressed in providing patients with a safe and reliable route to access cultivated marijuana to assist in alleviating symptoms. As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014 dispensaries have completed 3,300 transactions successfully to registered patients and caregivers.

The Department transmits weekly reports to the dispensaries identifying patients that have designated their respective dispensary to obtain marijuana or marijuana infused products for symptom relief. Each dispensary also undertakes several additional administrative steps to ensure that only card-holding patients or caregivers are provided access to purchase product. While the administrative process may vary by dispensary, all dispensaries must ensure that product is only dispensed to valid cardholders that have designated their dispensary. Procedures the dispensaries have implemented include: verifying patient and caregiver status before scheduling an appointment, remote video verification of cardholder status to allow access to dispensary, automated patient purchase history review and requiring secondary identity verification before transaction completion.

Each dispensary, when commencing their operations, faced challenges with new staff that required training; employees at the dispensaries had never worked in this industry prior to their employment at a dispensary. Training for all staff was required in order to become familiar with rules governing the industry along with protocols and procedures established by each dispensary. New protocols and procedures for dispensaries required adjustments to strengthen patient verification and inventory tracking. New point-of-sale software was implemented for inventory and patient management, improving the tracking of a patient status with the Marijuana Registry, individual dispensing limits, the creation of required trip tickets and enhanced plant tracking capabilities. Video surveillance is an important mechanism to assist with inventory accuracy tracking and preventing cultivation incidents with temperature and humidity warnings. Furthermore, by utilizing video surveillance the dispensaries are able to verify inventory transported to a second location associated with the dispensary and accuracy of patient transactions in conjunction with preventing and deterring intrusions.

All dispensaries have implemented appropriate security protections including but not limited to; video surveillance, motion sensors, automatic locking doors, and panic buttons to deter and prevent intrusion. These security systems are connected to outside security companies that professionally monitor premises around the clock. This technology also allows the Principal Officer of each dispensary to remotely monitor the premises from a computer or their smartphone. In conjunction with the mandatory security measures, patients and caregivers are required to schedule appointments to purchase marijuana or marijuana infused products to ensure that only authorized individuals acquire marijuana and any derivatives.

<sup>1</sup> The fourth dispensary, Southern Vermont Wellness, commenced operation on February 18, 2014 after the Committee convened for the purpose of preparing the 2013 Annual Report.



Attachment 2

**Vermont Marijuana Registry**

Counties	Total Patients	Patients using dispensary	% of Patients using a dispensary
Addison	59	40	68%
Bennington	43	30	70%
Caledonia	49	19	39%
Chittenden	216	169	78%
Essex	23	7	30%
Franklin	61	39	64%
Grand Isle	12	6	50%
Lamoille	38	19	50%
Orange	43	15	35%
Orleans	46	11	24%
Rutland	50	35	70%
Washington	142	76	54%
Windham	133	37	28%
Windsor	97	50	52%