The Legalization of Cannabis through a Health Equity Lens

Empowerment Congress

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Public Health's Role in Regulation of Cannabis

- Community Education and Prevention Messaging
- Policy Development and Advocacy
- Quality Standards and Safety
- Surveillance
- Prevention and treatment services
- **Health Equity**

Health Equity means that

everyone has the opportunities and resources needed for optimal health and well-being

Definition from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2017/04/what-is-health-equity-.html

Health Equity Approach

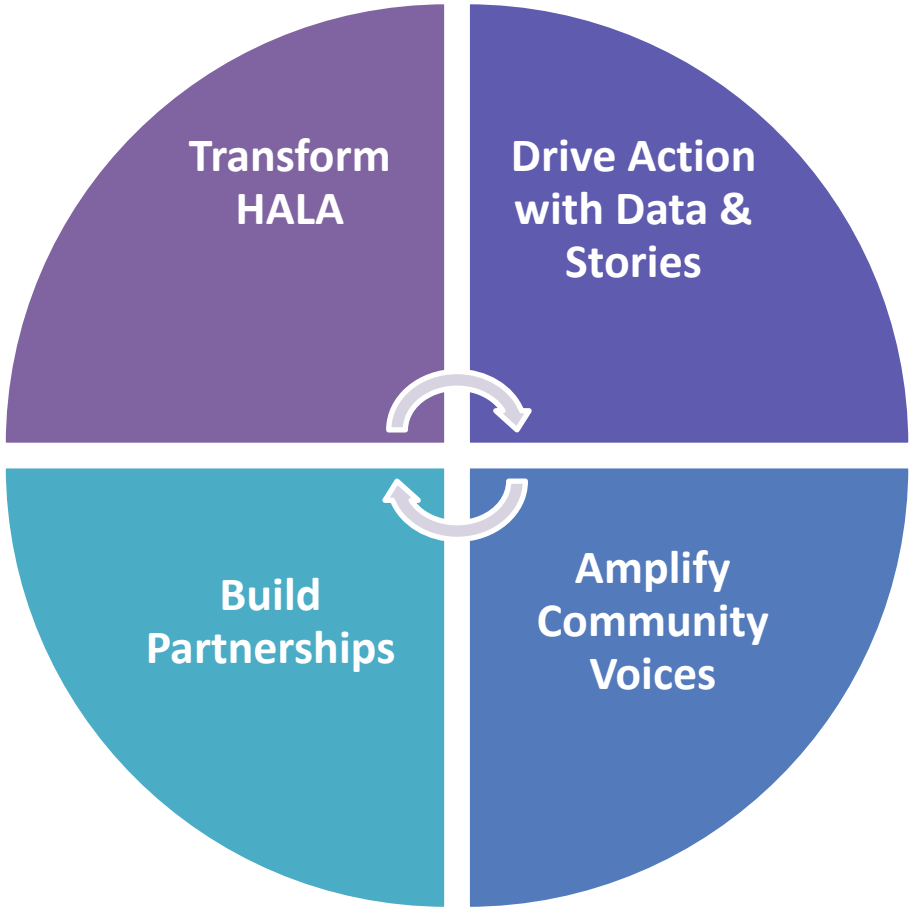
- Identify and address
- Promote system and policy strategies
- Focus on individual and population health
- Historical understanding

The Center for Health Equity (CHE)

- Initial CHE launch:
  - Community Launch Event
  - Listening Sessions

- CHE efforts will span across the Health Agency of Los Angeles (HALA) and will:
  - Leverage existing resources and efforts;
  - Ensure a racial and social justice lens; and
  - Serve as a critical touchpoint for partners and community

CHE's Four Guiding Principles



The Center's Key Focus Areas

Infant Mortality

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Environmental Justice

Health Neighborhoods

Cultural & Linguistic Competency

Cannabis and Health Equity – areas for consideration

- Prevent **unintended consequences** of policies
- **Assess enforcement** of existing policies and regulations
- **Prevent density** of cannabis businesses
- Advocate for a **public health approach** to substance use addiction as a chronic disease
- Ensure **equitable access** to prevention and treatment resources
- Promote **culturally appropriate messaging and prevention** campaigns
- Complete **health impact assessments**

Smoke Free Policies

- Smoke-free housing policies
- African Americans were more than **twice as likely** as whites to be arrested for public use of cannabis in Colorado post-legalization.

Disproportionate Impact of Cannabis Enforcement

Communities of color may still be disproportionately targeted and impacted by consequences specific to cannabis concerns:

- Public use
- Underage use
- Driving under the influence

Due to:

- Racial profiling
- Increased neighborhood policing
- More frequent checkpoints

Marijuana: One Drug, Two Stories

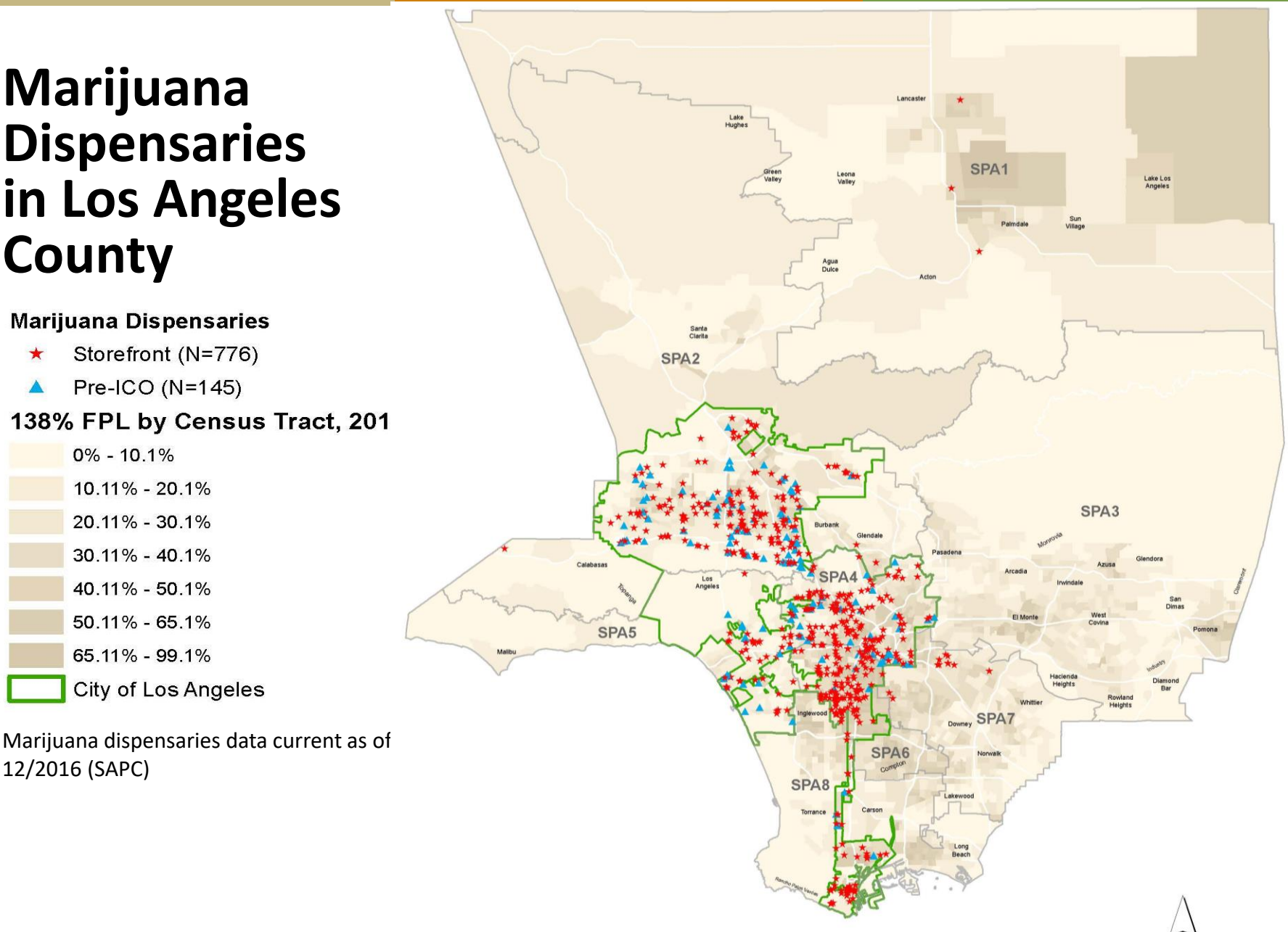
https://www.aclu.org/feature/war-cannabis-black-and-white

GREEN RUSH

Who benefits?

Who are disadvantaged?

Marijuana Dispensaries in Los Angeles County



Marijuana dispensaries data current as of 12/2016 (SAPC)

MARKET
LIQUOR
EBT

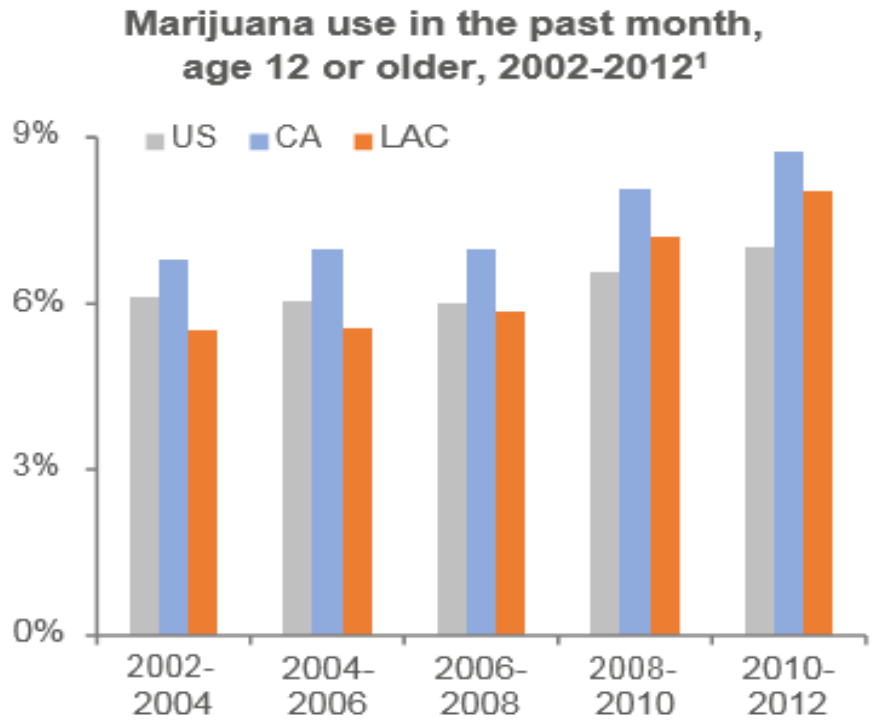
grace
Google

Policy Development and Advocacy

- Develop policies that:
  - Limit over-commercialization of cannabis, particularly in low-income and communities of color
  - Limit advertising and media marketing in areas with high exposure to youth
  - Create incentives to address inappropriate consumption and negative impacts in communities

Photo sources: *The Orange County Register*

Marijuana Use in LA County



Marijuana use in Los Angeles County (LAC) became greater than the US average after 2008

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Marijuana Use in the Past Month among Persons Aged 12 or Older, by State and Substate Regions. http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/content/SAMHDA/help/nsduh-estimates.html

Marijuana Use Among Youth,

CDC YRBS, LAUSD 2015

Students who reported using marijuana in last 30 days, were also significantly more likely to report they had…

- **Smoked tobacco** in last 30 days
- **Drove when drinking alcohol** in last 30 days
- Consumed **5 or more drinks in a row** in past 30 days
- Been in a **physical fight** in last 12 months
- **Been bullied** on school property in last 12 months
- Felt **sad or hopeless** every day for 2 or more weeks
- Seriously **considered attempting suicide** in last 12 months
- **Not used a condom** at last sexual intercourse (among students currently sexually active)

Health Impact Assessments can assess the health and other impacts on:

Decriminalization of Drug Addiction

- Shifting perceptions of addiction as a chronic disease versus criminal behavior
- While we have expanded the continuum of care for substance abuse treatment there are still barriers to access/utilization
  - Geographic accessibility
  - Training of Medi-Cal providers
  - Provision of culturally competent and linguistically appropriate services
  - Stigma and awareness
  - New models needed

Community Education and Prevention Messaging

- Work in collaboration with stakeholders to increase education, prevention, and treatment for cannabis misuse and addiction.
- Provide accurate, unbiased, culturally competent public health messaging and education about cannabis use.
- Develop strategies to reduce access to minors.

Washington State Department of Health anti-cannabis billboard aimed at the Latino community that sparked outrage

Equity Practices and Strategies

- **California** authorizes resentencing and destruction of records for prior cannabis convictions
- **Oakland, CA** prioritizes medical cannabis licenses for people who have been arrested for drugs or live in highly policed/ oppressed communities
- **Ohio** included a provision in its medical cannabis law ensuring that 15% of licenses go to people of color
- **Maryland** actively seeks racial, ethnic and geographic diversity when licensing, and requires it to encourage applicants who qualify as a minority business enterprise.
- Industry organizations have formed to represent the interests of women and people of color in support of greater inclusion

Additional Resources

- **DPH Prop 64 Resource Webpage:** http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/sapc/Prop64/Proposition64.htm
  - The Need for a Public Health Approach to Marijuana Policy: http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/sapc/PolicyBrief/PublicHealthApproachMarijuana.pdf
  - Substance Abuse Prevention & Control Medical Director's Brief: Marijuana Use/Abuse and Consequences: http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/sapc/MDU/MDBrief/MarijuanaBriefFinal.pdf
  - Environmental Health Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/sapc/Prop64/MarijuanaFAQ.pdf
  - Marijuana "Edibles" Fact Sheet: http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/sapc/MDU/DE/MarijuanaEdiblesFactSheet040416.pdf

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