



Where do researchers get their marijuana?

The 1961 international [Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs](#) and the [1970 Controlled Substances Act](#) establish a strict framework for marijuana, including how it can be studied. These measures declare that the federal government is the single source allowed to provide marijuana for research. Until May 2021, the government had designated the University of Mississippi as that source. For researchers who want to conduct Food and Drug Administration-approved tests using marijuana for medical purposes, the system amounted to a significant monopoly.¹ In May 2022, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) sought to expand that list, calling for applications from eligible facilities authorized by the Drug Enforcement Administration.² To be registered as a “marijuana grower” under what is called a “DEA Bulk Manufacturer registration,” applicants must meet several requirements to be qualified.³

University of Mississippi

The marijuana program under the University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy’s National Center for Natural Products Research began in 1968 through a contract with the federal government to cultivate marijuana for research. The project was first funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and later by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). The university “has secured this competitive contract every three to five years under an open solicitation process based on its proven capabilities of providing pharmaceutical-grade marijuana and marijuana-derived materials to NIDA’s Drug Supply Program.”⁴ The research conducted at the University of Mississippi includes studies about the botanical, pharmacological, and chemical properties of the cannabis plant. Studies are also conducted to support the development of FDA-approved drug products that are derived from cannabis.⁵ But, the researchers at Mississippi are not permitted to receive or analyze materials from a non-DEA registrant. This means that the strength or content of the products sold in licensed dispensaries cannot be compared to the cannabis that is being grown there.⁶ The quality of marijuana produced at the University of Mississippi is widely viewed as substandard, having more in common with hemp than marijuana that a consumer would find at a dispensary today.

As mentioned the federal government has taken steps to expand the pool of registered researchers and cultivators further. In November 2021, President Joe Biden signed an [infrastructure bill](#) that included provisions aimed at allowing researchers to study actual marijuana that consumers are purchasing from state-legal dispensaries (rather than being restricted to the marijuana grown at The University of Mississippi).⁷ The infrastructure measure “makes it so the Transportation Secretary would need to work with the Attorney General and Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop a public report within two years of the bill’s enactment that include recommendations on allowing scientists to access retail-level marijuana to study impaired driving.”⁸ Additionally, two marijuana research bills are currently making their way through Congress. The Cannabidiol and Marihuana Research Expansion Act (S.253) encourages scientific and medical research on marijuana and its compounds, but it would exclude cannabis commonly sold to adults or medical cannabis patients and would be limited to specifically-qualified researchers looking for specific research topics.⁹ The Medical Marijuana Research Act (H.R. 5657), would remove barriers for researchers seeking to study cannabis for medical purposes by amending the Controlled Substance Act, allowing researchers

to have access to marijuana commonly sold in dispensaries.¹⁰

In May 2022, The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) posted a “sources sought” notice calling for applications from eligible facilities authorized by the Drug Enforcement Administration.¹¹ To be registered as a “marijuana grower” under a DEA Bulk Manufacturer registration, applicants must meet several requirements including application standards, site visits, and signing a Memorandum of Agreement.¹²

These provisions to provide easier research accessibility are important in understanding the benefits and effects of the cannabis that state medical marijuana patients are using, rather than the federal cannabis that is being grown at one location. As legalization efforts at the state and federal levels continue, research becomes more significant for potential legislation and medicinal application purposes.

1 Evan Halper, “Mississippi, home to federal government’s official stash of marijuana,” Los Angeles Times, May 28, 2014, <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-pot-monopoly-20140529-story.html>

2 Kyle Jaeger, “Top Federal Drug Agency Seeks New Suppliers Of Marijuana For Research,” Marijuana Moment, May 23, 2022, <https://www.marijuanamoment.net/top-federal-drug-agency-seeks-new-suppliers-of-marijuana-for-research/>

3 The University of Mississippi, “Marijuana Research, Frequently Asked Question,” accessed July 14, 2022, <https://pharmacy.olemiss.edu/marijuana/faq/>

4 The University of Mississippi, “Marijuana Research, Frequently Asked Questions”

5 The University of Mississippi, “Marijuana Research, Frequently Asked Questions”

6 Halper, “Mississippi, home to federal government’s official stash of marijuana.”

7 Kyle Jaeger, “Biden Signs Infrastructure Bill Promoting Marijuana Research By Enforcing Access To Dispensary Products,” Marijuana Moment, November 15, 2021,

<https://www.marijuanamoment.net/biden-signs-infrastructure-bill-promoting-marijuana-research-by-encouraging-access-to-dispensary-products/>

8 Jaeger, “Biden Signs Infrastructure Bill Promoting Marijuana Research By Enforcing Access To Dispensary Products.”

9 Cannabidiol and Marihuana Research Expansion Act, S.253, 117th Cong.,

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/253/text>

10 Medical Marijuana Research Act, H.R.5657, 117th Cong.,

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/5657>

11 Jaeger, “Top Federal Drug Agency Seeks New Suppliers Of Marijuana For Research.”

12 The University of Mississippi, “Marijuana Research, Frequently Asked Questions.”