



## Medical Cannabis Program Implementation Timelines

The time states have taken to implement medical cannabis laws has varied widely. On the quickest end of the spectrum, Montana issued patient ID cards 41 days after voters approved a medical cannabis initiative in 2004, and Oklahoma issued business licenses just two months after that initiative's June 2018 enactment. Oklahoma's first medical marijuana dispensaries opened three months after the law's passage. Other states have also been able to swiftly implement medical cannabis laws: In Minnesota, Maine, and New York, the first dispensary sales occurred within 13 to 18 months of the laws' enactment.

West Virginia has been the slowest state to implement. More than three years after its May 2017 law passed, patients still lack legal protections, and no businesses have been licensed. Medical cannabis access is not anticipated until mid-2021 — at least four years after passage. Until West Virginia broke the record, the slowest state to provide patients ID cards was Maryland, where it took three years. West Virginia is now poised to be the slowest state to implement medical cannabis sales. In the other slowest three states to implement medical cannabis access — Delaware, Maryland, and Rhode Island — the first medical marijuana sales did not begin until three-and-a-half to four years after passage. (In two of those cases, concerning signals from federal prosecutors were largely to blame.)[\[1\]](#)

MPP encourages states to implement medical cannabis laws swiftly and responsibly. States should also grant patients who obtain a doctor's written certification immediate protections from arrest, rather than requiring them to needlessly suffer while they wait for a governmental agency to issue ID cards. Medical cannabis businesses should be promptly licensed, to provide patients with safe, convenient access to their medicine with undue delay.

Issuing a limited number of licenses based on competitive scoring licensing tends to lead to litigation, allegations of favoritism or bias, and delay. MPP encourages states to instead license *all* qualified applicants, while enforcing sensible regulations, mirroring the approach to regulating pharmacies. (Measures should also be taken to ensure inclusion and diversity in the industry.) If a state imposes a numerical limit on businesses, a lottery of qualified applicants — with adequate geographic distribution for retailers — allows more rapid implementation and less vulnerability to litigation than a scored system.

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<b>Alaska</b>	Nov. 1998	Applications were available in early June 1999, about seven months after passage.	N/A — No medical dispensaries	Voters enacted an adult-use marijuana law in Nov. 2014, and regulated sales began less than two years later, in Oct. 2016.
<b>Arizona</b>	Nov. 2010	Applications became available about five-and-a-half months after passage, on Apr. 14, 2011.	A little over two years after passage, in Dec. 2012.	An unsuccessful lawsuit by then-Gov. Jan Brewer delayed the implementation of dispensaries. Regulators published final rules on Mar. 28, 2011, and dispensary certificates were issued on Aug. 7, 2012.
<b>California</b>	Nov. 1996; subsequent legislation in 2003 and 2015	Prop. 215 did not provide for ID cards; voluntary cards were available later.	Prop. 215 did not provide for regulated sales. Dispensaries existed in a legal grey area until 2018.	Collectives received legal protections, but no licensing, in 2003. State regulatory and licensing law passed in 2015, and licenses were first issued in 2018. Voters enacted an adult-use marijuana law in Nov. 2016, and regulated sales began around a year and a month later, on Jan. 1, 2018.

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<b>Colorado</b>	Nov. 2000; June 2010: dispensary law	Patient applications were available in fewer than seven months, on June 1, 2001.	Dispensaries existed before there was a state law recognizing, licensing, and regulating them. They smoothly transitioned to a licensed system within a year of the 2010 dispensary law's passage.	The dispensary regulation bill began phasing in within two months of its passage, with the initial state form and fees due. Dispensary regulations were finalized and went into effect within one year of the law's passage. Also, voters enacted an adult-use marijuana law in Nov. 2012, and regulated sales began around a year and a month later, on Jan. 1, 2014.
<b>Connecticut</b>	May 2012	Temporary patient ID cards became available within five months of the law's passage on Oct. 1, 2012.	The first dispensaries opened about two years and five months after the law's passage in Oct. 2014.	The state began accepting business applications in Sept. 2013, about 16 months after the law's passage.

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<b>Delaware</b>	Passed May 2011; effective July 1, 2011	Patient applications were available 14 months after the law's passage on July 2, 2012.	Sales began about four years after enactment on June 26, 2015.	Then-Gov. Jack Markell significantly delayed implementation in light of a concerning letter he received from Delaware's U.S. attorney. Final regulations were approved in Jan. 2014. The first "compassion center" was approved on Aug. 11, 2014.
<b>Florida</b>	Nov. 2016	A registry became available on June 29, 2016 for patients under earlier, more limited laws. (A 2014 law allowed cancer, seizure, and MS patients to use and obtain low-THC, and a 2016 law allowed terminally ill patients to use THC-rich cannabis.)	Dispensary sales began in Sept. 2016, pursuant to earlier, more limited laws.	In 2017, the legislature passed a legislative framework for medical cannabis. The health department adopted regulations on July 3, 2017 to implement it and the constitutional amendment. Some of the legislative provisions — such as banning patients from smoking or otherwise using raw cannabis — have been challenged in court.

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<b>Hawaii</b>	June 2000; dispensary law signed July 14, 2015	Registry became available fewer than seven months after passage, on Dec. 28, 2000.	Sales began about two years after the dispensary law passed, in early Aug. 2017.	Dispensaries were licensed about nine months after the dispensary law passed.
<b>Illinois</b>	Aug. 1, 2013	Illinois first accepted patient applications a little over a year after passage, on Sept. 1, 2014 and Nov. 1, 2014 (depending on last name).	The first dispensaries opened on Nov. 9, 2015, about two years and three months after enactment.	Patient and caregiver ID card applications were first accepted 13 months after enactment. Medical marijuana business licenses were issued about 18 months after enactment.
<b>Louisiana</b>	May 19, 2016 (an earlier version of the law was not workable)	N/A — Law does not include patient ID cards	Sales began on Aug. 6, 2019, about three years and two months after the workable law passed.	The state licensed nine pharmacies in mid-Apr. 2018, two years after passage.

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<b>Maine</b>	Nov. 1999 initiative; revised by voters in Nov. 2009 and by the legislature in spring 2010 and spring 2011	ID cards were not available (or needed) under the 1999 law.	The first dispensary opened less than 17 months after the law's passage, in March 2011.	Maine's initial law did not have a patient registry or regulated dispensaries. Six dispensary registrations were issued in July 2010 and two more were issued in Aug. 2010. The 2009 law was fully implemented within a year of its passage, with regulations enacted and ID cards and dispensary registrations issued.
<b>Maryland</b>	April 14, 2014	The patient registry opened Apr. 10, 2017, nearly three years after the law passed.	The first dispensary sales began on Dec. 1, 2017, three years and seven months after passage.	Maryland enacted a law in 2013 that would have allowed academic medical centers to dispense medical marijuana. None stepped forward, and the law was revised in 2014. Maryland also has an affirmative defense, which can be used in court.

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Nov. 2012	The state began accepting patient applications just under two years after passage, in Oct. 2014. However, patients could initially use their doctors' written recommendations as ID cards.	The first dispensary opened in June 2015, about two years and seven months after passage.	Six months after Massachusetts' law was enacted, the state drafted rules, which followed listening sessions throughout the state. Within a year of the law's passage, the health department had completed the first of two phases of an application process. Following some questions about the process, the second phase was completed in June 2014. The first dispensary opened a year later.
<b>Michigan</b>	Nov. 2008; dispensary law Sept. 2016	Patient applications became available on Apr. 4, 2009, about five months after passage.	Dispensaries transitioned from lacking a state license and arguably being illegal under state law to having licenses in the last half of 2018, about two years after that law's passage.	Implementation of the patient and caregiver ID card program took about five months. The first dispensary licenses were issued in Aug. 2018, a little less than two years after the dispensary law's passage.

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<b>Minnesota</b>	May 29, 2014	Patient applications became available on June 1, 2015, just over a year after passage.	The first dispensary opened on July 1, 2015, about 13 months after passage.	The health department issued a preliminary draft of rules in Aug. 2014, less than three months after the law's passage. A second draft was issued on Sept. 5, 2014. On Sept. 5, 2014, the health department issued a request for applications for manufacturers. Letters of intent were due by Sept. 19. The department registered two manufacturers by Dec. 1, 2014, about seven months after passage.
<b>Mississippi</b>	Nov. 2020	The department shall begin issuing identification cards no later than August 15, 2021.	The department shall begin issuing treatment center licenses no later than August 15, 2021.	The department shall adopt final rules and regulations pursuant to this article no later than July 1, 2021.

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<b>Missouri</b>	Nov. 2018	Patients could begin applying for ID cards on July 4, 2019.	Medical cannabis cultivation began in summer 2020, and sales began in October 2020, about two years after enactment.	Regulators issued dispensary licenses in Jan. 2020, about one year and two months after the law passed. However, as of Nov. 2020, there are more than 900 appeals into the licensing process, several lawsuits, and a legislative investigation into alleged misconduct and conflicts of interest.

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<p><b>Montana</b></p>	<p>Nov. 2004; dispensary law Nov. 2016</p>	<p>Patient applications became available on Dec. 14, 2004, just 41 days after passage.</p>	<p>Dispensaries were not clearly allowed under state law until voters approved an initiative in Nov. 2016, but they existed before then. While initiative language required the licensing process to begin in the summer of 2017, it wasn't until Apr. 2018 that some businesses began receiving licenses.</p>	<p>Montana's medical marijuana law initially allowed caregivers to serve unlimited numbers of patients without dispensary licensing. The legislature dramatically limited the law in 2011 in an effort to remove caregivers and the businesses they operated from the program. In November 2016, however, voters approved an initiative clearly allowing both caregivers and dispensaries. Since that time, the state has begun transitioning to a more regulated program, including licensed businesses, although the process has seen significant delays.</p>

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<b>Nevada</b>	June 2001: patient registry legislation; June 2013: dispensary and cultivation law	Patient applications became available four months after passage on Oct. 1, 2001.	Sales began two months after the dispensary law's enactment, in Aug. 2015.	Dispensary rules were crafted 10 months after that law was enacted. The health department issued preliminary certificates in Nov. 2014, less than a year-and-a-half after the dispensary bill became law. Voters enacted an adult-use marijuana law in Nov. 2016, and regulated sales began about eight months later, in July 2017.

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<p><b>New Hampshire</b></p>	<p>July 23, 2013</p>	<p>Patient applications became available nearly two-and-a-half years after passage, in Dec. 2015.</p>	<p>Sales began two years and nine months after passage, on Apr. 30, 2016.</p>	<p>Patient and caregiver registry rules were approved on June 25, 2014. However, pursuant to the opinion of the state attorney general, the health department did not begin issuing ID cards until a patient successfully sued in Dec. 2015. Dispensary (ATC) rules were provisionally approved about 15 months after the law's passage. Preliminary dispensary registrations were issued one year and 11 months after the law's passage.</p>

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<b>New Jersey</b>	Jan. 2010	Patient applications became available more than 2.5 years after passage, on Aug. 9, 2012.	Sales began nearly three years after passage, on Dec. 6, 2012.	Due to reticence by then-Gov. Chris Christie, along with mixed signals from the federal government at the time, implementation was slow. Restrictive regulations were issued in Nov. 2010, but were rejected by the legislature. They were revised, and six "alternative treatment center" (ATC) licenses were preliminarily issued in March 2011.
<b>New Mexico</b>	Apr. 2007	Patient applications became available three months after passage, on July 6, 2007. Initially temporary ID certificates were available.	The first sales began in New Mexico in spring 2010, about three years after passage.	Although New Mexico was the first state to license larger-scale cultivation and dispensing, its rules were finalized and the first producer was licensed in less than two years. The first producer was registered in March 2009.

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<b>New York</b>	July 5, 2014	Patient applications became available about a year and five months after passage, in Dec. 2015.	The first eight dispensaries opened about 1.5 years after passage, on Jan. 7, 2016.	The Department of Health issued regulations within nine months of the law's enactment, in April 2015. Applications for registered organizations were due in June 2015, 11 months after the law's enactment.
<b>North Dakota</b>	Nov. 2016	The state began accepting patient applications in late Oct. 2018, about two years after passage.	North Dakota's first dispensary opened on Mar. 1, 2019, about two years and four months after voters passed the medical marijuana initiative.	The legislature rewrote the law in 2017. The health department granted preliminary approval to manufacturers in May 2018. It granted the first dispensary permits in Sept. 2018.
<b>Ohio</b>	June 2016	Patient applications became available about one-and-a-half years after passage, in Dec. 2018.	The first sales began on Jan. 1, 2019, about two-and-a-half years after passage.	

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<b>Oklahoma</b>	June 26, 2018	Patient applications became available about two months after passage, on Aug. 25, 2018.	Dispensary sales began within about three months of passage, by late Sept. 2018.	Emergency rules, which were revised from an earlier draft, were approved by the governor on Aug. 6, 2018, 41 days after passage. The health department began accepting applications from patients, caregivers, and prospective medical cannabis businesses a few weeks later, on Aug. 25, 2018.
<b>Oregon</b>	Nov. 1998; Aug. 2013: dispensary law	Patient applications became available about six months after passage, on May 1, 1999.	Dispensaries already existed upon the passage of the state law in 2013, but they were not clearly authorized by law or regulated. The first dispensary licenses were issued in Mar. 2014, about seven months after the dispensary law passed.	Implementation of patient and caregiver ID cards took just under six months. The first dispensaries were licensed about seven months after the dispensary law passed. Voters enacted an adult-use marijuana law in Nov. 2014 and regulated sales began about two years later, in Oct. 2015.

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
Pennsylvania	April 17, 2016	Patient applications became available about one-and-a-half years after passage, on Nov. 1, 2017. Also, minor patients could receive limited protections via a safe haven letter beginning in June 2017.	Medical cannabis sales began about one year and 10 months after passage, on Feb. 15, 2018.	The Pennsylvania Department of Health accepted applications for dispensaries and grower/processors beginning on Jan. 20, 2017.

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<p><b>Rhode Island</b></p>	<p>Jan. 2006; dispensaries authorized in June 2009</p>	<p>Patient applications became available about three months after passage, on Mar. 31, 2006.</p>	<p>The first medical cannabis sales were nearly four years after the dispensary law's passage, on Apr. 19, 2013.</p>	<p>The health department was expected to issue compassion center registrations in Sept. 2010. However, it maintained that none of the applicants qualified, so it restarted the application process. After approving three compassion centers on Mar. 15, 2011, then-Gov. Lincoln Chafee reversed course after receiving a letter from the U.S. attorney. The law was revised, causing further delay. In 2019, the state approved the addition of six more compassion centers. As of Nov. 2020, those licenses had still not been awarded.</p>

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<p><b>South Dakota</b></p>	<p>Nov. 2020</p>	<p>Nov. 18, 2021 (140 days after the effective date, July 1, 2021)</p>	<p>Possibly late 2021</p>	<p>The Department of Health is required to have finalized regulations, including those for medical cannabis establishments and potential applicants for licenses, by Oct. 29, 2021 (120 days after the effective date, July 1, 2021). The department is then required to issue a license no more than 90 days after receiving an application.</p>
<p><b>Utah</b></p>	<p>Nov. 2018</p>	<p>ID cards became available on Mar. 1, 2020, a year and five months after the law passed.</p>	<p>Sales began on Mar. 2, 2020, a year and five months after the law passed.</p>	<p>Cultivators were selected on July 19, 2019, nine months after the law's enactment. "Pharmacies" (which do not have DEA registrations that are required to sell most prescriptions) were licensed on Jan. 3, 2020, one year and two months after enactment.</p>

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<b>Vermont</b>	May 2004; dispensaries authorized on June 2, 2011	Patient applications were available around five months after passage, on Oct. 26, 2004.	The first dispensary opened in June 2013, about two years after the dispensary law's passage.	The Department of Public Safety began accepting dispensary applications 13 months after the dispensary law passed, on June 4, 2012.
<b>Virginia</b>	Low-THC law March 2017; expanded to full medical cannabis law in June 2020	Unknown	October 17, 2020	The Board of Pharmacy had until December 15, 2017 to issue proposed regulations for governing the program. The state now allows up to 25 dispensing locations. As of October 2020, only one is open.
<b>Washington</b>	Nov. 1998; further legislation clarifying rules related to medical use was passed in April 2015	ID cards are not required in the state of Washington, but a voluntary registry became available in July 2016. Registered patients get special privileges, including increased possession limits.	The law does not include state dispensary regulations, but adult-use stores have been able to have a medical marijuana endorsement since July 2016.	Washington implemented an adult-use marijuana law, which includes growers, processors, and retailers. The law passed in Nov. 2012, and the first stores opened in July 2014. Beginning in 2016, businesses could get a medical marijuana endorsement, and patients were able to get ID cards.

State	Law Enacted	Patient ID Card Timing	Dispensary Sales Began	Comments
<b>West Virginia</b>	Apr. 2017	As of Nov. 2020, the state is not yet issuing patient ID cards.	As of Nov. 2020, sales have not begun. It appears they will not begin until mid-2021 at the earliest.	As of Nov. 2020, more than three years after the law was enacted, patients have not been able to apply for ID cards and licensing has not begun. West Virginia is expected to become the slowest state to implement a medical cannabis program.

---

[1] In Delaware and Rhode Island, the delays were due in large part to concerning statements from those states' U.S. attorneys. Those programs were then reworked before they were implemented. Since late 2014, Congress has included a provision preventing the DOJ from interfering with state medical marijuana laws in every appropriations bill.

---