

Ballot Question #3 Implications to Public Health Departments

The Massachusetts Health Officers Association (MHOA), consisting of over 500 public health professionals, have evaluated and assessed information related to the proposed ballot initiative associated with “Medical Marijuana.” As public health officials, we have compassion for patients and individuals who suffer from illness. Our profession encompasses the health of individuals including prevention, protection, and promotion of one’s health. I have listed some of the implications we foresee for local health departments through the proposed ballot question.

- Marijuana does not appear on the United States Food and Drug Administration’s (USFDA) approved food additive list or approved drug list. Hence, as public health officials, we may consider marijuana-based products such as tea, candy, lollipops, soda, aerosols, brownies, etc., as food products only. Since the State and Federal Food Codes require that food items offered for sale shall be from an approved source, we will not be able to permit marijuana based food products in any of the proposed 35 marijuana retail stores in Massachusetts.
- Public health efforts to promote smoke free workplaces to reduce exposure to carcinogens have been successful over the last decade in Massachusetts. Marijuana smoke contains approximately 50-70 percent more carcinogens than tobacco smoke. Since the proposed facilities will not be privately secured, as in many other states, challenges to enforcing smoke free establishments for use of medical marijuana will be evident. Additionally, there will be challenges for officials in enforcing existing smoking laws if medical marijuana is allowed in public places, e.g. workplaces, restaurants, sporting events, school properties, etc.
- Many public health officials serve on local Substance Abuse Prevention Coalitions. One common theme within coalitions is reducing youth access. The proposed bill does not stipulate a minimum age for obtaining a medical recommendation (not a prescription) for access to the product(s). There is concern that youth may have easy access to purchase and possess marijuana.

In summary, there will be many implications to public health departments across the state that include challenges in permitting, regulating, enforcing, and youth access to illegal substances that need to be considered within the language of the ballot question as proposed.

Respectfully,

Terence Hayes

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