

Arizona Releases Third Annual Medical Marijuana Report, 52,000 Users in the State, Mostly Men

By Michael Tremoglie
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NEW YORK (MainStreet) — The third annual statistical report for the Arizona Medical Marijuana Program, which is issued in conjunction with the University of Arizona's Zuckerman College of Public Health, revealed tens of thousands of users -- the overwhelming majority of whom are male.

Arizona was the fourteenth state to legalize medical marijuana law in November 2010, after voters passed another ballot initiative. The Arizona Medical Marijuana Program (AMMP) was effective April 2011.

The report reveals that during the state's fiscal year, July 2013 to June 2014, there were a total of 52,374 active cardholders. This included 51,783 qualifying patients and 591 caregivers. 904 dispensary agent cards were issued.

Women comprised approximately 32% of the total qualifying patients and 33% of the total caregivers. Some 4% of patients and 62% of caregivers were authorized to cultivate pot. Men were 72% of the users, and women were 31%. The highest age demographic among men was between the ages of 18 and 30. They represented 32% of all male users, numbering about 9,500. Among women, the largest age demographic was between 51 and 60, numbering about 4,303.

Income-wise, approximately, 13% of the qualifying patients applied under Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Plan (SNAP) financial eligibility. This permitted them to pay a reduced fee for a card during this time period. The majority - 60% - of those who were SNAP eligible were males.

Yavapai was the county with the most per capita patients. It is where Prescott is located and north of Phoenix with a population of 211,073. Sedona is also partially located in the county. Qualifying patients per 1,000 residents numbered 14.9.

The majority of the qualifiers had one debilitating medical condition. The remaining 20% reported two or more conditions. Approximately, 71% indicated "severe and chronic pain" as their only debilitating medical condition.

While 615 doctors certified 51,783 patients during this time period, 60% of the patients were certified by only 25 physicians. The state issued 45 Approval to Operate certificates to medical marijuana dispensaries, and 38 became operational. The state is concerned about the skewed nature of physicians certifying eligible people. The Health Department is recommending

“intensive training for physicians who are high volume certifiers in conjunction with respective licensing medical boards for better patient provider coordination and adherence to AMMA statutory requirements.”

So what does this all say about marijuana in the Grand Canyon state?

For one thing it means that Arizona is serious about controlling marijuana. The report noted that Colorado is experiencing increased accidental ingestion of marijuana by those youths 12 and younger. So officials are aware of the problems.

But for Kevin Sabet, director of the University of Florida’s Drug Policy Institute and co-founder of Project SAM, a marijuana law reform group, the demographics are similar to those in other states west of the Mississippi. According to him the reality is that most people who utilize such programs do not suffer from serious medical conditions.

--Written for MainStreet.com by Michael P. Tremoglie