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# REPAIRING THE HARMS, CREATING THE FUTURE:

## CENTERING CANNABIS SOCIAL & HEALTH EQUITY IN LOS ANGELES

CAGE-FREE CANNABIS  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## REPAIRING THE HARMS, CREATING THE FUTURE: CENTERING CANNABIS SOCIAL & HEALTH EQUITY IN LOS ANGELES

The War on Drugs decimated many of Los Angeles' communities. With the passage of a national model Social Equity Program in the City of Los Angeles, we have the opportunity to repair the harm.

Despite the passage of this groundbreaking program and more than a year into the launch of adult use legalization, the City of Los Angeles still lags in addressing important issues in the implementation of a fair, equitable, and lawful cannabis scheme:

- Immediate and effective implementation of the City's groundbreaking Social Equity Program (SEP) designed to repair the harms of the war on drugs.
- Strict and effective regulation to ensure community safety and success of the legal market.
- Community reinvestment and cannabis corporate social responsibility to broaden the benefit of cannabis regulation and taxation.

The report lays out how the City of Los Angeles can address these issues by implementing cannabis regulation with an emphasis on social equity and community reinvestment.

These recommendations and policies are built on an existing foundation of policy and community efforts throughout the city that already emphasize social equity, and show how Los Angeles can (and should) become the national leader and innovator in equity policies in all aspects of governance



IMAGE CREDIT: DREW TAYLOR, UNSPLASH

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## WHAT IS SOCIAL EQUITY?

- Equity in implementation closes historical gaps that often align with place, race, and gender.
- In the present, equity requires deep partnership with affected communities that supports their participation and power.
- Finally, equitable implementation mitigates future disparities by building for the long-term (in adaptable ways) and anticipating future harms.

Most importantly, equity can be applied to a broad-based program that works across departments and policies. It must be present everywhere to be effective and not be isolated or "siloed." The more integrated, dynamic and expansive view of equity we construct, the more the results will be far-reaching and long-lasting.



IMAGE CREDIT: PAOLO JARA-RIVEROS

## SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

### 1. Immediate funding and infrastructure to DCR's Social Equity Program

Advance robust funding to DCR's Social Equity Program to **ensure that the first wave of licensing for SEP occurs with promised city programs and with the potential to reach affected communities** prior to licensing. Fast track a portion of funds to expand low-income and marginalized community access to **free and accurate information and support** to participate in the social equity licensing programs before the opening of the first 100 SEP retail licenses. By the second 100, **create a city-managed incubator system**, where the City has oversight directly over incubators. Direct substantive funding to **workforce development programs** to ensure the capacity of equity applicants/licensees to meet transitional/local hiring requirements and build the social equity workforce.

### 2. Create a Cannabis Health & Social Equity working group

Create a Cannabis Health and Social Equity working group at the City level, convened by the Cannabis Regulation Commission and Department of Cannabis Regulation (DCR), that would coordinate stakeholders at first monthly, then quarterly and in different areas of the city. From this group, write and **publish a comprehensive platform and Cannabis Equity Guidelines** that can be used to assess and decide upon budgeting for and activities related to cannabis by City agencies. Include a **process for accountability** anchored in these guidelines and **metrics to measure success** towards equity goals. Set up collaboration between DCR & Office of Cannabis Management (OCM) to scale this platform to the County.

### 3. Implement progressive and comprehensive enforcement

Develop a progressive and comprehensive enforcement strategy for cannabis regulations. Create a **multi-agency collaboration** on enforcement through the public safety taskforce for cannabis that also includes representatives from the public, particularly community members and organizations affected by the war on drugs. **Conduct a multi-step, non-punitive process.** Ensure coordination among various stakeholders in the process and a shared commitment to equity and restorative justice principles. Link in continued pathways for employment opportunities for those seeking a pathway out of the unregulated market, such as through apprenticeship, workforce development programs and job placement programs (see #1). **Integrate public education** to help communities determine regulated shops and distinguish regulated products.



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## SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

### 4. Halt criminalization and use diversion

Halt further criminalization of youth and ensure that any diversion programs are in line with models of social equity. Link the Department of Public Health and LAUSD with the Cannabis Health and Social Equity Working Group to **ensure alignment and equity principles in the youth drug counseling & safety programs**. Ensure youth input into such programs and their ability to address health equity.

### 5. Use cannabis funds for community reinvestment and health

Direct 100% of cannabis tax funds beyond those required for the City's cannabis regulation activities to specific needs related to health and social equity related directly to cannabis, e.g. **create a community reinvestment fund to repair the intersecting harms of the war on drugs**. This should include both programs empowering formerly-incarcerated adults and similar investment in youth development and early education, per previous discussions in City Council, the objectives of Prop M (2017) and best practices in health and social equity.

### 6. Create pathways to public consumption zones

Create a pathway to **publicly-managed consumption zones** that are free, accessible and meet the needs of medical and low-income patients.

### 7. Develop reporting to measure progress and advance equity goals

Define the City of LA's **corporate social responsibility reporting requirement** for cannabis businesses in ways that deal with the specific past, present and future harms and benefits linked to the industry. Incentivize programs that directly reflect the needs of and give power to those most affected by health/social equity, and reward innovation and creativity. Integrate with any merit-based SEP and other licensing system going forward.

## SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

### 8. Real, usable data on equity progress

Strengthen data on equity to **track progress towards community and expert-defined metrics**. Expand data on the past effects of the war on drugs, in particular incorporating LA Sheriff's Department data and LAUSD data on cannabis-related suspensions/expulsions and school-site policing.

### 9. Create national standards and make LA a leader on equity

Expand knowledge and shared resources on equity across cities and regions by sponsoring a **National Cannabis Repair & Equity Summit** in Los Angeles.



IMAGE CREDIT: PAOLO JARA-RIVEROS

