

Cannabis Public Health Advisory Council Meeting #16 -Minutes
Wednesday, July 15, 2026 · 4:00 – 6:00pm

Members Present:

Dr. Deondra Asike
Dr. David Gorelick
Karrissa Miller
Dawn Berkowitz
Dr. Nishant Shah
Christine Nizer
Dr. Elizabeth Kromm
Dr. Leigh Vinocur
Jason Semanoff
Sen. Benjamin Kramer
Del. Terri L Hill
Arinze Ifekauche

Members Not Present:

Jocelyn Bratton-Payne
Dr. Madhumi Mitra

MDH Staff Present:

Erin Portillo
Dana Moncrief
Kate Natafgi
Snehal Gawhale
Sara Demetriou
Tyra Hudgens
Jody Sheely
Victoria Marte-Tiburcio
Nikardi Hynes

Members from Public:

Walter Simmons
Dr. Pamela Matson
Tabatha Robinson

1. Open Meeting. 4:02 PM.

- a. Dr. Deondra Asike officially called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m. on July 15, 2026 and provided an overview of the meeting's agenda.
- b. Erin Portillo took a roll call; a quorum of 10 members was present. Additional Council members joined shortly following the roll call. Dr. Asike reminded members to review the attendance summary emails that had been distributed, which included each member's Council and workgroup meeting attendance for the year to date. Members were asked to notify staff of any discrepancies.
- c. The Council reviewed the draft minutes from the April 15 and April 28, 2026, meetings. Maryland Department of Health staff reported receiving one minor grammatical edit to the April 15 minutes and no edits to the April 28 minutes. Nishant Shah moved to approve both sets of minutes with the noted grammatical correction, Karrissa Miller seconded the motion, and the amended minutes were approved with no objections.

2. Maryland Cannabis Data Overview

Nikardi Hynes, Program Manager for Health Equity Surveillance and Evaluation at the Maryland Department of Health, presented findings from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) and the Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey/Youth Tobacco Survey (YRBS/YTS) on adult and youth cannabis use in Maryland. Following the presentation, Council members discussed the interpretation of demographic differences in cannabis use, particularly among groups disaggregated by sexual orientation. Ms. Hynes clarified that reported disparities were compared with the statewide average and explained how sample size, confidence intervals, and statistical significance influenced the interpretation of the findings.

The Council also discussed opportunities to strengthen future survey questions, including exploring why individuals discontinue cannabis use after trying it. MDH staff explained the process for proposing new survey questions, noting that survey space is limited and new questions typically require the removal of existing ones. Council members requested a summary of the Council's previous survey recommendations, which had been incorporated into the current survey. MDH staff agreed to provide that information and noted that many of the current cannabis-related survey questions originated from prior Council recommendations. Future survey recommendations will continue to be considered through the Council's Data and Surveillance Workgroup.

3. Opportunities to Address Contextual Drivers of Youth Cannabis Use

Dr. Pamela Matson, Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Director of Research in the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine, presented findings from her research on

the social and environmental factors that influence youth cannabis use. Dr. Matson described a qualitative study that engaged adolescents and young adults in Baltimore to better understand how peer relationships, romantic relationships, life stressors, and community conditions shape cannabis use. Participants identified stress, relationship conflict, poverty-related challenges, family dynamics, and community violence as key drivers of cannabis use, while also perceiving cannabis as having few harms and many social or emotional benefits. Dr. Matson emphasized that cannabis was often used as a coping mechanism, but ultimately contributed to poorer communication, unhealthy relationship patterns, and increased reliance on cannabis over time.

Dr. Matson also discussed discrepancies between youth perceptions and traditional surveillance data, noting that many adolescents do not consider themselves cannabis users if they share cannabis with friends rather than purchase it themselves. She suggested this may lead to underreporting in surveys and highlighted the need to improve youth-focused surveillance, prevention messaging, and assessment of emerging modes of use, such as vaping. She further emphasized the importance of addressing underlying mental health needs, improving access to youth substance use treatment, and considering environmental and policy factors, including retail outlet density. During the discussion, Council members asked about protective factors, policy recommendations, and tobacco demand-reduction strategies. Dr. Matson highlighted the importance of supportive adult relationships, strengthening the adolescent behavioral health workforce, engaging youth in policy development, and using simulation modeling to evaluate potential policy impacts before implementation.

4. MCA Updates on Federal Rescheduling

Maryland Cannabis Administration (MCA) Director Tabatha Robinson provided an update on recent federal cannabis rescheduling developments. She explained that the U.S. Department of Justice's April 2026 order uses an international treaty mechanism rather than the traditional federal rulemaking process. The order applies to state medical cannabis programs, although Maryland's dual-use licensing structure creates some implementation questions. Director Robinson outlined potential implications for licensed businesses, including Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) registration requirements, inspections, and reporting obligations, while noting that many aspects remain uncertain pending additional federal guidance. She emphasized that MCA will continue serving as the state's primary regulator, coordinating with federal and state partners, and providing information to licensees without recommending whether businesses should pursue DEA registration. She also highlighted the potential tax benefits available to cannabis businesses under the federal order and noted that Maryland is well positioned to adapt because of its existing regulatory framework. During discussion, a Council member asked about implications for independent testing laboratories, and Director Robinson responded that no additional federal

guidance has been issued but expressed confidence in Maryland's readiness to respond as requirements become clearer.

5. Trends in THC Potency in Maryland's Licensed Cannabis Market

Dawn Berkowitz (Maryland Cannabis Administration) presented findings from MCA's analysis of THC potency trends in Maryland's regulated cannabis market, conducted in response to a prior Council recommendation. She reviewed sales and potency data for flower, vape products, and edibles, noting continued increases in THC concentrations for flower and vape products, while edible potency remains limited by Maryland's statutory caps. Ms. Berkowitz discussed several public health considerations, including the challenge of evaluating increasingly potent products using older research, the potential for more frequent use of high-potency vape products, and the risks of unintentional pediatric exposures to high-potency edibles. She also outlined potential future recommendations for Council consideration, including public and industry education, consumer labeling, and continued monitoring of potency trends. During discussion, Dr. Gorelick asked whether Maryland's higher medical edible potency limits have slowed the decline in medical cannabis enrollment. Ms. Berkowitz reported that while the medical patient population has decreased since adult-use legalization, survey data indicate that many remaining patients continue to value the medical program for product access and other benefits. Karrissa Miller added that medical patients also benefit from tax exemptions on medical cannabis purchases.

Following the presentation, Council members discussed additional considerations related to vape products, including device settings, product labeling, and laboratory testing. Dr. Asike suggested that future recommendations could include consumer education on vaporizer settings and labeling for higher-potency products. Ms. Miller clarified that Maryland laboratories test vape products in their final devices but do not currently evaluate the aerosol produced during use. Dr. Gorelick noted that testing inhaled emissions would provide more meaningful public health data but acknowledged that implementing such testing would require significant investment in laboratory equipment and methodology.

6. Public Comment

No comments from the public.

7. Closing

Dr. Deondra Asike concluded the meeting by outlining the timeline for development of the Council's 2026 recommendations. She asked each workgroup to meet as needed to finalize proposed recommendations by September 30 for inclusion in the annual report, with potential focus areas including high-potency THC products, product labeling, and impaired driving. Dr. Gorelick recommended providing draft recommendations to the full Council at least one week, and preferably two weeks, before the Council's October meeting.

to allow adequate review. Dana Moncrief confirmed that a draft report would be distributed in advance and that the October 21 Council meeting would focus on discussion and approval of the final report. After confirming there were no public comments, David Gorelick moved to adjourn, Nishant Shah seconded the motion, and the meeting adjourned.

8. Adjournment 6:12 pm