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Cannabis Education Training for Monterey County, Pregnant & Lactating Mothers

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**Abstract**

The Monterey County Health Department received a grant under Proposition 64 legalizing cannabis in California for use by adults 21 or older. The training focuses on educating the Environmental Health Bureau on the adverse effects of cannabis use during gestation and lactation. The research found an excess of women consume cannabis during gestation and lactation. A 2016 study showed that 8.5% of pregnant women between 18-25 used cannabis (Ryan, Ammerman, & O'Connor, 2018). The Environmental Health Bureau is involved in inspections and has established relationships with local dispensaries to share infographics and knowledge on the issue. The survey conducted to assess the success of the training received valuable feedback from Environmental Health and County staff. The training was deemed successful by 100% of the participants. It is recommended in the future to incorporate the training manual directly in dispensaries for employees to have at their disposal and as a reference.

*Keywords: cannabis, women, lactating, pregnant, education, Monterey County*

### **Agency & Communities Served**

The Monterey County Health Department (MCHD) will be overseeing the creation of a cannabis training manual. It will be done explicitly within their cannabis education program. The cannabis education program works with dispensaries to provide educational materials to serve the community best and keep the community healthy. The MCHD is a public agency, and most of the funding comes from grants, government taxes, and county funding. The mission of the Monterey County Health Department is - “... to Excel at providing Quality Services for the benefit of all Monterey County residents while developing, maintaining, and enhancing the resources of the area” (Public Health, n.d.). The Monterey County Health Department serves everyone within county limits. A few values the Monterey County Health Department holds are, assuring honesty and integrity, providing top-tier customer service, practicing continuing innovation, and always treating our fellow employees, customers, and residents with respect at all times (Public Health, n.d.).

The cannabis education program is under the Disease Prevention and Protection Branch. This branch has a total of four programs. The programs are the cannabis program, oral health, tobacco retail licensing, and the tobacco control program. The programs in this branch are administered through educational programs directly into the community.

The Monterey County Health Department has over eighty partners, programs, and organizations. The partners vary by each branch and department. An example of one partner is the Monterey County Collaborates. This partner focuses on reducing tobacco use, smoke-free housing, dental health, responsible tobacco, cannabis, and alcohol, and lastly, healthier lifestyles (Monterey County Collaborates, n.d.).

### **Demographic Profile**

The Monterey County Health Department serves 435,594 people in Monterey County (Census Reporter, n.d.). Forty-nine percent of the Monterey County population is female. It is similar to the rate for the state of California at 50 percent (Census Reporter, n.d.). In Monterey County, 4.7 percent of women between 15-50 years old gave birth. The largest fertile age group in Monterey County is 25-29 years old (Census Reporter, n.d.). The cannabis program aims to provide services and education to all Monterey County residents. In 2015 there were 6,426 live births in Monterey County (Monterey County Health Department, 2017). Hispanic mothers had the most live births in 2015. The second highest racial/ethnic group to reproduce was White, non-Hispanic women.

Monterey County ranks 29th in California for exclusive breastfeeding (Cal WIC, 2014). In Monterey County 70.9% of breastfeeding is exclusive. A study by the California WIC Association (2014) showed that 96.4% of mothers provided some form of breastfeeding. The training manual focuses on educating the Environmental Health Bureau on the adverse effects cannabis may have on a baby during gestation or lactation.

### **Community Needs**

The cannabis training manual directly focuses on pregnant and lactating mothers and their children. There are many benefits to health education. Touro University (2020) explains how vital health education is to the communities it serves. Monterey County is leading its communities to have better, healthier lives. Blending knowledge from many valuable sources such as biological, environmental, medical sciences, and psychology can lead to ultimately better health outcomes for the population (Touro University, 2020). Another study showed that higher literacy rates significantly correlated with better knowledge on specific health issues (Rasheed & Al-Sowielem, 2003). The Monterey County education attainment statistics show the need for

extra education for mothers. Only 25.7% of the population obtain a bachelor's degree or higher (Census Reporter, n.d.). The need for education comes in two different forms. The training manual will educate the Environmental Health Bureau staff, educate dispensaries and, ultimately, pregnant and lactating women on the adverse effects cannabis may have on the child. Educating the populations at risk, and leading them to make the best decisions for themselves and their families, is more receptive than forcing abstinence.

The County's cannabis program population is similar to California's and other surrounding counties within the State. The State's ultimate goal is to provide education to encourage safe cannabis use. The educational programs at MCHD are designed to have equal access to everyone, no matter their social or economic disparities. The educational materials offered will be free of charge to promote the education of safe cannabis use.

The cannabis program solely works with cannabis from an academic standpoint. The community assets that exist, and will primarily support our educational programs, will be Environmental Health. This public service, already established in the community, will aid education regarding cannabis and the long-term effects and well-being of pregnant and lactating mothers and the child in Monterey County.

### **Problem Description**

Monterey County has eighteen dispensaries. Six of those dispensaries are in unincorporated areas. Many women are under the impression that cannabis is a natural substance and that leads to this product's use without regard for its adverse effects. In a study conducted by the CDC (2018), 1 in 20 women in the United States used marijuana while pregnant. This training manual will educate the environmental health staff of the possible harmful effects cannabis could have on pregnant and lactating women and pass this information onto dispensary

staff. Cannabis use in a community affects everyone in that community. Retailers are responsible for selling cannabis and educating their consumers on how to use the product safely. Each of these issues eventually becomes a public health problem. A few contributing factors become the focal point of our problem: there are too many mothers consuming cannabis during gestation and lactation. Some of the factors that contribute to this problem are that it is a new product and cannabis retailers advertise it as a safe product, however there is no scientific research surrounding cannabis use and its long-term effects on the consumer. The consequences of not addressing this problem leads to the lack of education consumers receive from retailers. This, in turn, may cause harm to a child during gestation or lactation if the mother uses cannabis, low birth weight, and studies have shown cannabis can affect brain development (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2020). The ultimate goal of the training manual is to educate teams about cannabis use and its possible adverse effects to keep the community healthy.

## **Introduction**

The macro problem identified is that too many mothers consume cannabis products during gestation and lactation in Monterey County. Since cannabis has been legalized in California and many other states, it is seen as the new and hip product to use. As cannabis continues to grow in popularity, there is still very little scientific research on the adverse effects it can have on undeveloped brains and its effects on unborn or breastfeeding children. There has been an increase in usage by pregnant and breastfeeding mothers as the ‘miracle’ nausea drug. A study done between 2009 and 2016 discovered a 5.3% usage rate in women’s first trimester of their pregnancies (Finholm, 2018). There is no research on the adverse effects cannabis may have on an unborn child, so out of safety, Monterey County urges women not to use cannabis during gestation and lactation.

### Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
New & hip	Too many women consume cannabis products during gestation and lactation in Monterey County	Low birth weight
Advertised as a safer option		Cause harm to children during gestation or lactation
No scientific research around the topic		Affect brain development

### Contributing Factors

As the cannabis industry grew and states began to legalize cannabis in 2016, it became the new hip product. “ In 2018, more than 11.8 million young adults used marijuana in the past year” (NIDA, 2019). As an attempt to entice the younger generation who previously turned to alcohol when they turned 21, the cannabis industry had to find a way to encourage the new generation to use cannabis. The cannabis industry has given alcohol a bad name, exaggerating the lingering effects of hangovers the day after drinking, whereas cannabis has no lingering day after impact. As much as cannabis is portrayed as a better option for gatherings and having fun, it is also advertised as a safer option.

An article by the Washington Post mentioned that cannabis might be safer than previously predicted (Ingraham, 2019). Yes, it is a natural substance, but that does not eliminate the reality that cannabis can adversely affect its consumers. Cannabis can have many adverse long-term effects on an individual. Some of these effects are breathing problems, increased heart rate, intense nausea and vomiting, and child development issues during and after gestation (NIDA, 2019).



Most research on the transmission of cannabis to babies is a hypothesis of what scientists see in substances such as other stimulants. The County's focal point, which is pregnant and lactating women, has seen substances such as coffee, alcohol, and tobacco passed to a child through gestation or lactation. From this knowledge alone, the program focuses on educating in the sense of caution until scientific research justifies the assumptions.

### **Consequences**

A study conducted by The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists showed statistically notably smaller birth lengths and head circumference among offspring exposed to cannabis during gestation (2017). The findings also showed that low birth weight was typical in mothers who were exposed to cannabis. There was a direct correlation of these effects in babies whose mothers used higher quantities of cannabis during the first and third trimesters (The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 2017). Studies show long-term brain development issues for babies exposed to cannabis. Cannabis can affect memory, learning, and behavior throughout a child's life (SAMHSA, 2020). The scientific data surrounding the effects cannabis has on breastfeeding children is still vague. Another study found that THC and CBD can be detectable in breast milk for up to six days post-exposure (Davis, Lee, Weber, & Bugden, 2020). Most studies on the effects on children of mothers who use cannabis focused a great deal on the number of cannabinoids in breast milk rather than the lasting effects on the child. Health professionals recommended that women expecting or breastfeeding avoid cannabis use due to the unknown adverse effects that are possible.

## **Capstone Project Description and Justification**

### **Capstone Project & Project Purpose**

This training will be known as the Cannabis Education Training Manual. The manual will train the Environmental Health Bureau so they can educate dispensaries in Monterey County. The most essential sections of the manual will be educating about the lasting adverse effects of using cannabis during gestation and lactation. The purpose of the cannabis education program is to increase the awareness of dispensary staff and the Environmental Health Bureau around the harmful effects of women using cannabis during gestation and lactation.

### **Project Justification**

There is limited information about the harmful effects cannabis could have on the community, especially when considering pregnant and lactating women and the effects it may have on the child. Research shows that several substances such as caffeine, tobacco, and alcohol can have adverse effects on a child during gestation and while breastfeeding. With this information that has long been studied, it is safe to say that there could be negative repercussions if cannabis is used during these critical periods.

Many women are informed that cannabis is a natural substance and safe for morning sickness, nausea, and suppressed appetite. This false sense of security could be putting many children at risk for unknown long-term effects of cannabis. Marketing cannabis as a completely safe and natural substance to use during pregnancy, without scientific evidence to back it up, is dangerous.

The problem identified for this specific program is that dispensaries should be aware of the possible adverse effects cannabis could have on their consumers and the community. Since this program focuses on the overall well-being of the community, dispensaries should be

expected to have a wide range of scientifically based knowledge and not just know how to sell cannabis.

The goal is to create a training manual that Environmental Health will adopt and pass on to dispensaries for training new employees. The cannabis education training will educate on the possible harmful effects cannabis may have on a child and how to educate everyone involved. For instance, the training manual will include a small info card for dispensaries to hand out if necessary. This will, in hopes, eventually become a policy to protect children.

The program's short-term goal is to create a training manual for Environmental Health to become more aware of the adverse effects of cannabis use if women use cannabis during gestation or lactation. The training manual is a great way to train Environmental Health on these adverse effects of cannabis. They are the team's boots on the ground, working directly with dispensaries daily, and can even bring this manual along with them to share. The training manual aims to direct participants to supplemental resources, lead discussions, listen effectively, and make accurate observations (CDC, n.d.).

### **Stakeholders**

There are a few people who will be interested in the cannabis education program moving forward. The stakeholders in this program will be the Regional Resource Management Agency, Monterey County Environmental Health, Joann Iwamoto, the cannabis program manager, and dispensary owners and managers. The Regional Resource Management Agency (RMA) will be a key stakeholder as their jobs are looking at Monterey County's future and how specific programs can benefit the community. The RMA vision statement states that RMA works to enhance the community's safety (County of Monterey, n.d.). The Cannabis Education Training Manual will specifically focus on the health and wellbeing of pregnant & lactating women and the child.

Monterey County Environmental Health will also play a part in the success of this program. Environmental Health focuses explicitly on promoting responsible business practices by providing educational opportunities in the industry (County of Monterey - Health Department, 2016). Environmental Health will be one of the Health Department leads in delivering the education directly to dispensaries across Monterey County. Environmental Health is also the program's direct connection to local dispensaries. This is how the program will grow its relationships with owners and managers of the local dispensaries.

Joann Iwamoto is the cannabis program manager for the sister program. The cannabis program that Mrs. Iwamoto manages tackles the policy, certifications, and permitting of dispensaries and cannabis farms in Monterey County. Mrs. Iwamoto will be working closely with the team to create a cohesive program for Monterey County dispensaries. Mrs. Iwamoto also focuses on educational segments to promote the health and safety of our community (Monterey County Cannabis, n.d.). Working together will be a great asset to the cannabis education program in Monterey County.

Our final and most crucial stakeholders are the dispensary owners and managers across Monterey County. The help of dispensaries voluntarily including the cannabis education program into further education of their staff will change dispensaries for the focus groups in Monterey County. By incorporating dispensary owners and managers involved in the health and safety of the community, we hope that the information we share will be passed on to community members.

### **Benefits**

The positive outcomes of the cannabis education program are limitless. Some of the projected results are to decrease the sales of cannabis to pregnant and lactating women,

education being pushed to expecting women and lactating women through educational cards.

The training manual will be continuously updated as the information surrounding cannabis and its effects during gestation and lactation change daily.

### **Project Implementation**

Before implementing the Cannabis Education Training Manual, the MCHD worked closely with Michelle House and Maggie Barrera on the essential components of the training. This included key informant interviews, as well as meeting and establishing relationships with dispensaries across Monterey County. In addition to those critical components to creating the curriculum, there was also a follow-up survey for key informants and research to build a successful Cannabis Education Training Manual. These meetings included our key informants, who comprised local dispensaries and Environmental Health, so they felt they are included in creating this deliverable. The team had another partner from the County, assisting in formulating questions for the dispensaries, and Maggie and I added questions and changed them where we saw fit. These interviews and meetings were completed in January 2021. After the interviews were conducted, the team went over the ideas, contributions, and input of everyone involved and added them to the curriculum as the team believes will benefit the community. Additionally, deciding if additional material to the manual will need to be added. As cannabis data changes daily, the team focused on broad aspects instead of the tiny details that tend to change more often. A rough draft was submitted to Michelle for review, and the final touches were made at the beginning of May 2021. The team shared the final draft document with Environmental Health for their input. Environmental Health was provided a survey allowing additional comments for last-minute edits. The comments received from the survey were reviewed and

added to the training manual. A detailed implementation plan and timeline can be found in the Scope of Work in Appendix A.

### **Resources & Participants**

No outside resources are needed for this specific project. The County itself provides everything. Since it is a training manual, the Environmental Health Bureau and other stakeholders will have the ability to access this document as a hard copy or an electronic PDF. The only resource that will be monetary will be the agency personnel time and cost of printing and creating the hardcopy version. Since this program is an extension of the Proposition 64 grant, the grant will supplement the funds for the employees who will continue to work on this manual as the print costs.

### **Challenges**

This Cannabis Education Training Manual is created to be prepared for all challenges that may occur. This program will be a living document due to the frequent changes in cannabis and its effects on breastfeeding children or babies in utero daily. The training manual can be accessed at any time as a PDF or hardcopy. This mode of delivery is perfect for any situation that may come up.

### **Overview**

The Cannabis Education Training Manual is a tool to educate Environmental Health and, ultimately, the dispensaries and consumers of cannabis in specific populations. This manual is an extension of the Proposition 64 grant the Monterey County Health Department received earlier this year. The Cannabis Education Training Manual will be accessible to dispensaries across Monterey County. The cannabis training will have a primary focus on the education of Environmental Health of the adverse effects of cannabis use by women who are pregnant and

lactating. This is the basis of the project while including the overall safety of those affected by cannabis use. Having local dispensaries support this training execution would help lead the team to a successful outcome and healthy, safe communities.

The first course of action for this training is to interview our key informants, such as partners from Environmental Health and other stakeholders. These interviews are casual and conversation-based, so there is no creation of surveys or formal questionnaires for these meetings. The interview process for key informants started in November 2020. The key informant's opinions and suggestions were completed by the end of November 2020. The team then progressed to include dispensary owners/managers in creating this educational training. The team was eager to have dispensaries directly involved in the development of this manual. This collaboration encouraged the support and embracement of the training manual into local dispensaries. This portion of the implementation process varies by the cooperation of dispensaries in Monterey County. The team began the research for the training manual in January 2021 and continued to build on the manual through March 2021. Throughout March 2021 and April 2021, the final touches to the curriculum were completed before it was handed over to Environmental Health.

### **Assessment Plan**

The Monterey County Health Department's expected outcomes are to educate Monterey County Environmental Health on the adverse effects cannabis may have on an unborn or breastfeeding child. This training manual guides Environmental Health through role-play scenarios to share with local dispensaries and shares scientific research surrounding the negative effects of cannabis use while pregnant and lactating.

The Monterey County Health Department will continuously collaborate with its partners to ensure the information is up to date with new research findings and get this information to Monterey County dispensaries. We will be using the KWL ( know, want to know, learned) method of learning to assess what our trainees want to learn, what they already know about the topic, and what they learned from the training. This will assess how well our training is designed and if it is targeting our objectives.

When the training manual was near completion, the Health Department sent out a survey with questions regarding the organization and content of the training manual. This was sent to our team, as well as Environmental Health, and some of our key informants. We had 3-4 closed-ended questions as well as 1 open-ended for further comments. Based on the feedback received, MCHD took every comment into consideration and has done their best to accommodate everyone's comments, and adjust the training manual to fit the goals.

<b>Short term outcome(s)</b>	<b>Intermediate outcome(s)</b>	<b>Long-term outcome(s)/impacts</b>
<p>Create an educational training for Environmental Health about the adverse effects of cannabis use in pregnant or lactating women.</p>	<p>Increased knowledge of Environmental Health about the adverse effects cannabis has on an unborn or breastfeeding child.</p>	<p>Decrease sales of cannabis to pregnant and lactating women in Monterey County</p>



### **Project Results**

The Cannabis Education Training Manual received positive feedback from the survey sent out regarding the clarity and ability to meet the objectives of the training. The initial projected outcome for the training was to address the unknown effects cannabis use during gestation and lactation may have on a child. The survey received 100% agreement that the deliverable was user-friendly from survey participants (2021). Additionally, 66.7% of the participants agreed that the training manual's content matched the objectives stated initially, and 33.3% did not agree that the deliverable content matched the objectives. The 33.3% that did not agree was addressed, and the team added what was mentioned as missing in the training manual. A table relaying this information in more detail is available in Appendix B.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

Creating this training manual deliverable for the Monterey County environmental health was not exactly smooth. It was an incredible experience. Being introduced to creating County deliverables and following grants and specific guidelines was difficult. It was a learning curve alongside learning to do all of this remotely. Being unaware of the percentage of women who choose to use cannabis during gestation and lactation, the true number was shocking. It has been an honor to create a deliverable that will positively impact the community. Since we recognized that cannabis education and research changes daily, this training manual should be updated annually. Updating the document annually promises the most up-to-date information for the individuals using the manual. The final recommendation would be to have the training manual available to all dispensary staff as a reference.

**Personal Reflection**

I have had an extraordinary experience working with the Monterey County Health Department in the cannabis program. My mentors have guided me and encouraged me to do things I never imagined myself being able to do. I am grateful for the experiences and skills gained over the past year and a half and ready to take these skills into the workforce.

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## Appendix A

### Scope of Work & Timeline

<b>Scope of Work Template</b> ( <i>Sample phases, activities, deliverables, timeline</i> )					
<b>Title:</b> Cannabis education training manual					
<b>Project description:</b> Create a curriculum that educates environmental health on the risk cannabis could have on its consumers, specifically pregnant/lactating women.					
<b>Goal:</b> Create an educational manual for environmental health					
<b>The project's primary objective:</b> Increase the knowledge of possible adverse effects cannabis can have on the consumer and decrease the sales to pregnant/breastfeeding women and persons already under the influence.					
<b>Phases</b>		<b>Activities/Tasks</b>		<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Timeli ne/ deadli nes</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Select capstone project</b>	<b>1.1</b>	Discussed capstone project ideas with mentor and agency staff	Generated a list of capstone project ideas.	<b>Aug 2020</b>

		<b>1.2</b>	Discussed ideas with agency staff	Submitted a list of potential ideas to mentor for review/approval	<b>Sept 2020</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Plan project</b>	<b>2.1</b>	Met with key informants to gather information about what should be added to the training manual .	Created a list of ideas for what should be addressed in the training manual .	<b>Nov 2020</b>
		<b>2.2</b>	Met with dispensaries & collaborated to gather information and see what they would like to see in the training.	Created a list of ideas for what needed to be addressed in the curriculum. Another County employee formulated questions and analyzed the data collected from the interviews.	<b>Nov/Dec 2020</b>

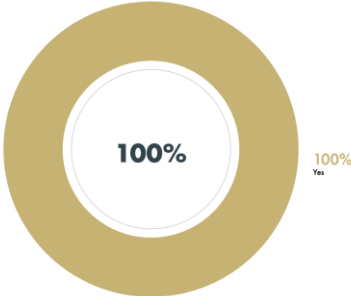
3	<b>Implement project</b>	3.1	Organized the information collected from key informants	Started prioritizing what the team will include in the training manual and begin researching the topics.	<b>Jan 2021</b>
		3.2	Brought the information to Michelle to be approved before starting the training manual	Started building the training manual -- reading material	<b>Jan/February 2021</b>
		3.3	Finalized training manual	All information gathered from interviews and research has been added and approved by Michelle	<b>March 2021</b>
4	<b>Assess project</b>	4.1	Picked stakeholders to assess and give feedback on the training manual	Reviewed feedback from the survey	<b>May 2021</b>



		<b>4.2</b>	Created a survey	Reviewed feedback from the survey and added recommendations	<b>May 2021</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Report on project findings</b>	<b>5.1</b>	Completed reporting requirements	Final agency and capstone reports	<b>May 2021</b>
		<b>5.2</b>	Prepared capstone presentation in a selected format	Presented at Dress Rehearsal for grading	<b>May 2021</b>
		<b>5.3</b>	Final preparation for Capstone Festival	Final Capstone Festival presentation!	<b>May 2021</b>

Appendix B

Is the training user friendly?



Did the content match the objectives?

