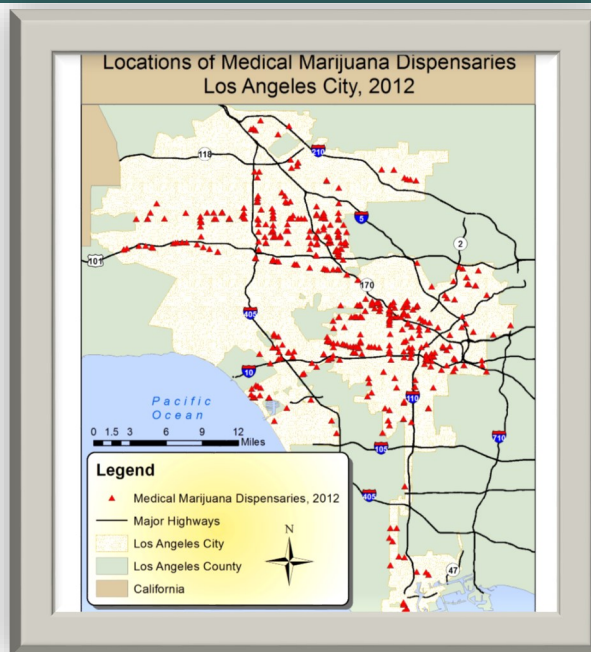




# What types of neighborhoods are medical marijuana dispensaries in? City of Los Angeles, 2012

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In 1996, California passed Proposition 215, also known as the Compassionate Care Act, allowing for the production, distribution and cultivation of marijuana for medical purposes. Local municipalities determine how medical marijuana could be distributed within their boundaries. In spite of measures designed to regulate distribution, many have concerns regarding where dispensaries operate in communities. Jurisdictions have struggled to standardize the spread of dispensaries, particularly within the city of Los Angeles where hundreds of dispensaries are located. Los Angeles has attempted to regulate the number of dispensaries through ordinances that include zoning restrictions limiting the locations of dispensaries around schools and similar sites. However, little is known about the spatial distribution of dispensaries resulting in widespread concern about whether or not some communities, such as minority communities, are being disproportionately affected by their presence. This report explores the relationship between neighborhood demographics and density of dispensaries in Los Angeles.

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**Methods.** This study used an ecological, cross-sectional design to explore the relationship between neighborhood demographics and density of dispensaries in Los Angeles. The sample included all Census tracts within Los Angeles City boundaries (n = 1000). The dependent variable is density of medical marijuana dispensaries per area (mean = 3.380). Data for the independent variables were obtained from 2012 GeoLytics Inc. estimates, which uses the U.S. Census Bureau's state and county level estimates of population and income characteristics (including data from the American Community Survey), along with area-level birth and death records to calculate current year estimates for smaller geographies. Data were analyzed using Bayesian conditionally autoregressive (CAR) models that include controls for correlated heterogeneity due to spatial structure of the data

**Findings.**

- Census tracts with higher percentage of Hispanic residents have more dispensaries.
- Higher density of dispensaries was located in areas with higher percentage of commercially zoned land, greater densities of on-premise alcohol outlets, greater densities of off-premise alcohol outlets, and having at least one highway on or off ramp.
- The percentages of Black residents, Asian American residents, youth under the age of 20, and concentrated disadvantage, were not related to density of dispensaries.
- Density of schools, and density of parks and libraries were not related to density of dispensaries.

**Implications.** City zoning requirements appear to control locations of dispensaries such that they locate in commercial areas with specific place characteristics. Thus, zoning laws that regulate the location of dispensaries appear to be an effective mechanism to prevent the overpopulation of dispensaries in undesirable areas. For example, dispensaries are located in commercially zoned areas rather than residential areas. However, certain populations, such as Hispanic residents, may be disproportionately impacted by the density of dispensaries in communities. In order to prevent the overpopulation of dispensaries in any particular area, policymakers might consider local regulations to monitor the number of dispensaries in a given jurisdiction.

Similar to findings in other cities, census tracts with higher densities of dispensaries also have greater densities of alcohol outlets. Neighborhood areas with a large number of alcohol outlets may signal to those looking to open dispensaries that this is a place that will not advocate against its existence or may identify locations where similar types of businesses have been successful. Dispensaries are also located in areas with highway access suggesting that easy roadway access might be an important feature of where dispensaries are located.

Local medical marijuana policy continues to evolve, both within California and across the country. As policymakers continue to explore and identify the impact of medical marijuana policies on constituents, future studies might consider a longitudinal analysis to examine the trends in dispensary locations over time in order to more thoroughly explore the effect of policy changes and the implications for the successful regulation of dispensary locations.

**The full paper can be found at:**

Thomas, C. & Freisthler, B. (forthcoming) Examining the Locations of Medical Marijuana Dispensaries in Los Angeles. *Drug and Alcohol Review*. doi: 10.1111/dar.12325

