



LOCAL

Hundreds go to RISE Hagerstown for the first day of recreational-use cannabis in Maryland

But there are limits on who can use marijuana legally, how much they can have and where they can use it.



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Recreational-use cannabis is now legal in Maryland. At the RISE Dispensary on Saturday in Hagerstown, legalization day brought crowds of people who had been waiting years for this moment.

The RISE Dispensary on Wesel Boulevard is believed to be the only dispensary for recreational marijuana in Washington County. The company, owned by Green Thumb Industries, has other Maryland locations in Joppa, Silver Spring and Bethesda.

The company owns a manufacturing facility in Centerville.

All profits from the first day of legalization at the RISE Dispensary are being donated to Mission of Love Charities, an organization serving homeless and low-income families.

Meredith Breeden, 39, of Williamsport said she has seen the change in the public's perception of cannabis.

When she was 15, cannabis helped Breeden recover from anorexia, she said. During this time, she wrote an article to a teen magazine about how cannabis helped her. It was never published.

“Back then, I tried to inform people about pot and misconceptions ... I never thought that I was going to see this,” Breeden said.

As an adult, Breeden used cannabis to get off of heroin. She later got a medical card but, renewing the card every year becomes difficult and expensive, she said.

How have dispensaries, users prepared for marijuana legalization?

Medical cannabis has been legal in Maryland since 2014. RISE Hagerstown opened in 2019.

With an expected increase in sales, RISE has been working on accommodations to ensure an easy and quick

experience for medical customers, according to Green Thumb Senior Vice President of Revenue Dominic O'Brien.

The location has a drive-thru which will only be available to medical-card holders. Inside the store, there are separate lines for medical-use patients.

Brittany Smith, a medicinal cannabis user from Hagerstown, said she has used RISE since it opened. Smith thinks it's great that other people will have the opportunity to purchase cannabis.

"Medical marijuana has helped me get to a functional state. Obviously it's going to be busier, but I don't think that's a bad thing," Smith said.

Why do people use marijuana?

Many adults have stress and pain that marijuana can help with, Smith said.

She said she used to be somewhat opposed to marijuana use, but after her family members started using it, she said she realized marijuana was a healthier way to deal with pain. Before using cannabis, Smith had to take ibuprofen multiple times every day for back and knee pain.

Terry Lee Hill, 63, of Hagerstown has used cannabis since he was a teenager. The legalization of recreational cannabis will make the state safer, Hill said.

He used to purchase his cannabis on the street, which he said can be violent and dangerous. Since he got his medical marijuana card, he finds the process is much more relaxing.

“One of the advantages of a dispensary is that it eliminates people out here doing unjust things and putting themselves in jeopardy ... there’s no violence,” Hill said.

He said he came to RISE Saturday morning because his medical card expired three days ago. With recreational use now legal, he was able to pick up his normal prescription without waiting to get his card reissued.

Hill’s reason to use cannabis has changed throughout the years. As a teenager, he used cannabis as a distraction from the violent environment he was in. Now, he uses cannabis for his anxiety, to relieve pain and just to get high.

Steve Tibbs, 36, and Herb Evans, 67, were the first two people in line, arriving at 6 a.m. for the 8 a.m. opening.

Evans said the legalization of recreational cannabis has been long overdue. He barely slept the night before because of his excitement.

As a self-styled “connoisseur” of weed, Evans said he wanted to be first to go inside and test out the quality of RISE’s products.

What benefits might Maryland see from marijuana sales?

Tibbs said he was opposed to marijuana use at first, but once it was legalized in his old state of California, he could see the benefits.

Using marijuana in California completely took away Tibbs’s restless leg syndrome and saved his life, he said. Additionally, he saw the improvements his old state made as a result of cannabis taxes.

Cannabis sales in Maryland will be taxed at a 9% rate, according to the state comptroller's office.

Anyone 21 and older can purchase and possess up to 1.5 ounces of cannabis flower, 12 grams of concentrates and 700 mg THC edibles. Those of age can grow up to two indoor plants per household.

Over two-thirds of midterm voters, including more than half of Washington County, voted in 2022 in favor of legalizing cannabis for recreational use.

Much like open-container laws with alcohol, smoking marijuana in public and on federal property is banned under the new law.

O'Brien, of Green Thumb, said that the ending of marijuana prohibition is a historic day in Maryland. The War on Drugs has been a failure and has led to disproportionate harm to communities of color, he said.

"The Free State of Maryland is going to get a little more free," O'Brien said.