

Balancing commerce and public health in disadvantaged communities

Addressing inequities

Historically, data indicate there is a disparity in marketing and sales of health-compromising addictive products, such as alcohol, nicotine, and cannabis, to populations in disproportionately impacted communities.

Statistically, Black Americans have been more likely to be arrested than their white counterparts for cannabis-related offenses. These arrests often have long-lasting economic and social ramifications like employment difficulties and family disruptions.

Retailer businesses selling alcohol, tobacco, or cannabis products are over-concentrated in low-income neighborhoods¹ and minoritized neighborhoods, particularly among Black and Latinx communities^{2,3}.

Also, despite Washington's legalization of cannabis, Black persons are still arrested for cannabis-related offenses at five times the rate of white persons⁴.



Protecting vulnerable communities

Racially diverse, economically depressed communities, particularly those with more youth, are shown to be the most vulnerable to exposure and availability of health-compromising products, including the sale of cannabis products, alcohol, nicotine, and vaping products.



Finding a balance

Although it is important to support economic opportunity for historically disadvantaged communities, it is important to protect communities from potential harm, particularly if a trend in vulnerability has been identified.

Policymakers should consider the following regarding substance use:

- **Health:** Could the distribution of licenses contribute to health harms?
- **Location:** Are licenses distributed with consideration of existing health disparities?
- **Marketing:** Can promotion and marketing of certain products exacerbate health disparities?
- **Engagement:** How are community stakeholders, including health professionals, parents, youths, and educators, included in the oversight of potentially harmful substance sales?
- **Evaluation:** How will social equity licensing be evaluated to determine potential impact on health and safety?
- **Prevention:** Will or can effective upstream prevention be well funded specifically for disproportionately impacted communities?

Additional information

More information can be found in these [research briefs](#). Questions: prevention@hca.wa.gov

Washington State Health Care Authority has developed a series of briefs on science-based, equitable policy strategies for reducing harm from controlled substances:

- Goal: Protecting Youth from the Harmful Effects of Alcohol, Cannabis, and Commercial Tobacco (Nicotine) Marketing and Promotion
- Location Matters: Access, Availability, and Density of Substance Retailers
- Pricing of Legal Cannabis Matters: Taxation is an Important Tool for Deterring Cannabis Misuse and Supporting Prevention Strategies
- Keeping All Washington Youth Healthy: Strategies for Addressing Disparities in Substance Retailer Locations and Marketing

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References

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