

Hawaii pot dispensaries can legally open, but none are ready

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Medical marijuana dispensaries can now legally open in Hawaii, but not one is ready to do so.

The state Department of Health said none of the state's eight dispensaries was approved to open by July 15, the first day they were allowed by law.

One big hurdle is the state hasn't certified a lab to test the dispensaries' products.

"On the dispensary front, they're all doing their best to open their doors with as diverse a product line to serve all of the many needs of the patients and all the qualifying conditions that are out there," said Chris Garth, executive director of the Hawaii Dispensary Alliance. "Until those products can be tested in a clinical capacity, no dispensary will be able to open their doors, no matter how perfect their product is."

The state hasn't yet received any applications from interested laboratories, said Janice Okubo, spokeswoman for the Department of Health.

Spectra Analytical Lab is working on an application, but the lab needs to be certified as meeting international standards, said Michael Covington, lead chemist.

"It's a big deal for a lab to get that certification, and that's why nobody's

applied yet," Covington said.

If approved, the lab aims to open by December, and would test products for potency and traces of substances like heavy metals and fungus, he said.

Hawaii was among the first states to legalize medical marijuana more than 15 years ago, but dispensaries were only legalized last year. The state's estimated 13,000 patients approved for the drug were generally left to buy it on the black market or grow it on their own.

There's a long list of steps before dispensaries can open. They have to set up an indoor crop growing facility, get building permits and get a certificate from narcotics enforcement. Some dispensary executives say they hope to open by the end of 2016.

On Maui, dispensary licensee Pono Life Sciences has selected potential sites and is waiting for approval from the Department of Health, said Dean Okimoto, chief agronomist.

"I'm glad we're going slowly and cautiously because we want to be doing this the right way, and making sure that the people of Hawaii are protected in all of this," Okimoto said.

Green Aloha, a dispensary on Kauai, hopes to begin growing plants soon, said CEO Justin Britt in an emailed statement. The company has obtained permits for its building and is working on a large electrical upgrade, but it's premature to project an opening date, he said.

Hawaii announced licensees selected to open the state's first [medical marijuana](#) dispensaries in April. Actor Woody Harrelson and video game entrepreneur Henk Rogers, famous for his work on "Tetris," were among dozens who applied but were not selected.

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