

Louisiana widening access to medical marijuana under new law

June 16 2020, by Melinda Deslatte



In this Aug. 6, 2019, file photo file photo, Marijuana plants growing under special grow lights, at GB Sciences Louisiana, in Baton Rouge, La. State lawmakers are poised to greatly expand Louisiana's medical marijuana to make more people eligible for the treatment, under a bill that continued Wednesday, May 20, 2020, to speed toward final passage. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert, File)

More Louisiana residents will have access to medical marijuana under a significant expansion of the state's therapeutic cannabis program that was signed into law by Gov. John Bel Edwards.

The [changes in the law](#), which take effect in August, allow doctors to recommend [medical marijuana](#) for any patient they believe it would help, and remove restrictions on which doctors can recommend cannabis.

The state House and Senate agreed to the bill—sponsored by Republican Rep. Larry Bagley of Stonewall, the chairman of the House health committee — in the regular session that ended June 1. The House [voted 75-16](#) for the measure, while the Senate agreed in [a 28-6 vote](#).

Edwards, a Democrat, announced Monday evening that he had signed the bill into law.

Under a 2015 law and additional changes passed since then, Louisiana allowed cannabis to treat a long list of diseases and disorders including cancer, seizure disorders, epilepsy, glaucoma, post-[traumatic stress disorder](#) and Parkinson's disease.

Bagley's legislation expands that to include any condition that a doctor "considers debilitating to an individual patient." In addition, the new law will no longer require [doctors](#) to register with and receive authorization from the Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners to recommend cannabis for patients.

Only the agricultural centers at Louisiana State University and Southern University are authorized to grow cannabis in Louisiana, and only nine dispensaries can provide it to patients. LSU's grower has been selling products since August, while Southern's grower hasn't yet started its sales.

Marijuana can be available in oils, pills, liquids, topical applications and in an inhaler, such as that used by asthma patients—but not in a smokeable form. LSU's grower currently offers cannabis in a flavored liquid tincture, a bottle containing a dropper to use, but the company has said it intends to expand that to also include dissolving strips taken by mouth.

More information: House Bill 819: www.legis.la.gov

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Citation: Louisiana widening access to medical marijuana under new law (2020, June 16) retrieved 23 March 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-06-louisiana-widening-access-medical-marijuana.html>

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