

Puerto Rico betting on medical marijuana to help ease crisis

August 1 2017, by Danica Coto



In this July 24, 2017 photo, Noel Sola, a cultivation worker at Natural Ventures carries marijuana plants in Caguas, Puerto Rico. Medical marijuana is legal in 29 U.S. states, but legislators in the largely conservative island of Puerto Rico had been reluctant to embrace an industry that the island's treasury secretary says could generate up to \$100 million a year in part through a sales and use tax, as well as help ease an unemployment rate that has hovered around 12 percent, the highest compared with any U.S. state. (AP Photo/Ricardo Arduengo)

Puerto Rico is joining more than two dozen U.S. states in pinning a little

of its future on medical marijuana.

The territory legalized medical marijuana by decree nearly two years ago and new Gov. Ricardo Rossello has signed a measure setting out a legal framework for the industry. Backers say that will spark an expansion of the pot fields, manufacturing centers and dispensaries popping up across the island.

Already nearly 9,000 Puerto Ricans have paid \$25 a year for a permit to use [medical marijuana](#) to treat at least 14 pre-approved conditions including HIV, cancer, multiple sclerosis, migraines, anxiety and epilepsy.

The island's treasury secretary says the industry could generate up to \$100 million a year, a rare bright spot for an island suffering a grinding economic crisis.



In this July 24, 2017 photo, David Quinones, operations director of Natural Ventures speaks during an interview in Caguas, Puerto Rico. "Name one new industry in Puerto Rico capable of generating millions and billions in capital and improving an economy in a mega crisis. There is none," said Quinones, operations director of the island's largest cultivation and manufacturing facility of medical marijuana. (AP Photo/Ricardo Arduengo)



In this Monday, July 24, 2017 photo, two Natural Ventures production workers pack cannabis paraphernalia in Caguas, Puerto Rico. Investors in Puerto Rico have spent more than \$3 million to obtain licenses issued by the island's health department to cultivate, manufacture and sell medical marijuana. (AP Photo/Ricardo Arduengo)



In this July 24, 2017 photo, Juan Manuel Rodriguez, an investor at Natural Ventures smells a jar of marijuana final product, in Caguas, Puerto Rico. Nearly 9,000 Puerto Ricans pay \$25 a year for a permit to use medical marijuana to treat at least 14 pre-approved conditions including HIV, cancer, multiple sclerosis, migraines, anxiety and epilepsy. (AP Photo/Ricardo Arduengo)



In this July 24, 2017 photo, Noel Sola, a cultivation worker at Natural Ventures inspects germinated marijuana plants in Caguas, Puerto Rico. In addition to buying licenses for medical marijuana, everyone ranging from patients to growers pays an 11.5 sales and use tax, with 10 percent of those revenues going to the trauma center at Puerto Rico's largest public hospital, which faces a shortage of funds.(AP Photo/Ricardo Arduengo)



In this July 24, 2017 photo, Noel Sola, a cultivation worker at Natural Ventures inspects marijuana plants in Caguas, Puerto Rico. Investors in Puerto Rico have spent more than \$3 million to obtain licenses issued by the island's health department to cultivate, manufacture and sell medical marijuana. (AP Photo/Ricardo Arduengo)



In this July 24, 2017 photo, Juan Manuel Rodriguez, an investor at Natural Ventures shows a marijuana final product, in Caguas, Puerto Rico. The island's largest public university also benefits from the sale of medical marijuana , with 50 percent of revenue from fines issued to those who violate the new law going to an institution whose budget has been slashed amid the crisis. Violations include operating without a license or selling medical marijuana to patients with no permit. (AP Photo/Ricardo Arduengo)



In this July 24, 2017 photo, marijuana plants bloom at a laboratory in Natural Ventures in Caguas, Puerto Rico. Experts say that compared with U.S. states, Puerto Rico offers lower tax rates and is not subject to a federal tax law that prohibits investors from deducting cannabis-related operating expenses for tax purposes. (AP Photo/Ricardo Arduengo)



In this July 24, 2017 photo, Marijuana plants bloom at a laboratory in Natural Ventures in Caguas, Puerto Rico. Medical marijuana was legalized nearly two years ago in the U.S. territory via executive order, but it wasn't until this month that a new governor signed a law that formalizes the industry and provides legal backing that is much harder to overturn or amend than an executive order. (AP Photo/Ricardo Arduengo)



In this July 24, 2017 photo, Marijuana plants bloom at a laboratory in Natural Ventures in Caguas, Puerto Rico. Medical marijuana is legal in 29 U.S. states, but legislators in the largely conservative island of Puerto Rico had been reluctant to embrace an industry that the island's treasury secretary says could generate up to \$100 million a year in part through a sales and use tax, as well as help ease an unemployment rate that has hovered around 12 percent, the highest compared with any U.S. state. (AP Photo/Ricardo Arduengo)



In this July 24, 2017 photo, a Natural Ventures worker trims marijuana plants in Caguas, Puerto Rico. One gram costs roughly \$20, although some dispensaries have specials for \$10 a gram, which is roughly the average price in U.S. states where medical marijuana is legal. (AP Photo/Ricardo Arduengo)



In this July 24, 2017 photo, Juan Manuel Rodriguez, an investor at Natural Ventures inspects marijuana plants in a bloom room in Caguas, Puerto Rico. Investors in Puerto Rico have spent more than \$3 million to obtain licenses issued by the island's health department to cultivate, manufacture and sell medical marijuana. (AP Photo/Ricardo Arduengo)



In this July 24, 2017 photo, David Quinones, operations director of Natural Ventures shows a pack of processed marijuana in Caguas, Puerto Rico. Medical marijuana is legal in 29 U.S. states, but legislators in the largely conservative island of Puerto Rico had been reluctant to embrace an industry that the island's treasury secretary says could generate up to \$100 million a year in part through a sales and use tax, as well as help ease an unemployment rate that has hovered around 12 percent, the highest compared with any U.S. state. (AP Photo/Ricardo Arduengo)



In this July 24, 2017 photo, marijuana plants are seen at a laboratory in Natural Ventures in Caguas, Puerto Rico. Medical marijuana was legalized nearly two years ago in the U.S. territory via executive order, but it wasn't until this month that a new governor signed a law that formalizes the industry and provides legal backing that is much harder to overturn or amend than an executive order. (AP Photo/Ricardo Arduengo)

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