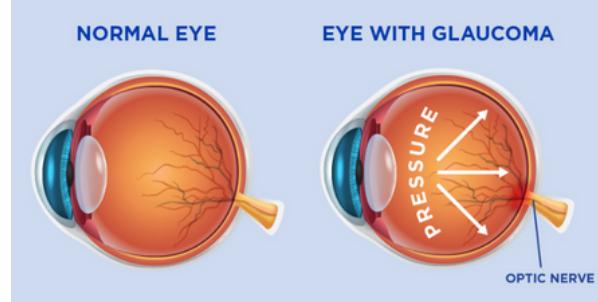


HAWAII MEDICAL CANNABIS NEWSLETTER

The Science

Medical cannabis and glaucoma

Glaucoma is an eye disease that damages the optic nerve, leading to gradual vision loss. It is one of the leading causes of blindness in adults over the age of 60. The progression of glaucoma can often be delayed or even prevented if elevated intraocular pressure (IOP), meaning eye pressure that is higher than normal, is detected early and treatment begins promptly.



Conventional methods for treating glaucoma



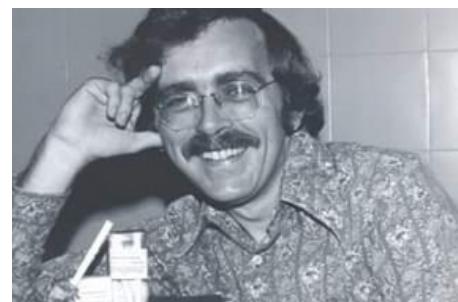
Treatment can involve the use of prescription eye drops that lower eye pressure by reducing fluid in the eye or helping fluid drain. Treatment typically requires two or more eyedrops a few times a day. Medication side effects, poor patient compliance, and inadequate response to eye drops are common. For patients who are unresponsive to eye drops there are also surgical procedures available that can be extremely effective, but carry some risks and may not last forever.

Cannabis not recommended as treatment for glaucoma

Organizations like the American Academy of Ophthalmology,¹ the American Glaucoma Society,² and the Glaucoma Research Foundation³ **advise against using cannabis to treat glaucoma.** These organizations point out that while cannabis can lower IOP, this lasts only for a few hours,⁴ and glaucoma needs treatment that lasts 24 hours a day. A patient would have to consume very high levels of THC throughout the day to reduce IOP, which is not practical because of many side effects. Also, cannabis can lower blood pressure, which may reduce blood flow to the optic nerve.⁵ This could increase the risk of faster vision loss in people with glaucoma. Patients and providers should be especially cautious when considering cannabis as a treatment for glaucoma.

History of cannabis use and glaucoma

The idea of using cannabis to treat glaucoma emerged onto the public stage in 1976. Robert Randall, a young college professor going blind from intractable glaucoma, successfully petitioned the FDA for access to federal supplies of cannabis to treat his disease through the FDA's Compassionate Investigational New Drug program.⁶ His success paved the way for others to join the federal program and spawned a national campaign to improve patient access to medical cannabis.



Robert Randall

HAWAII MEDICAL CANNABIS

NEWSLETTER

History of medical cannabis

In this and the next set of newsletters, we will explore the medical history of cannabis, from ancient times to the present day. Examining the shift from traditional medical use toward commercialization helps reinforce the importance of intentional, informed, and responsible use today.

According to Chinese legend, Emperor Shen Nong (around 2700 BCE), considered the father of Chinese medicine, was the first to document the medicinal use of cannabis. His teachings were later recorded in the *Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing*, considered the oldest Chinese pharmacopeia, which lists cannabis as a medicine. The text describes cannabis (Ma or Ma Fen) as supporting weight gain and other conditions, while also warning that taking too much "may make one behold ghosts and frenetically run about."⁷



Emperor Shen Nong depicted by Guo Xu

Although cannabis was mainly used for food and textiles at the time, plant remains containing THC were found in a tomb in western China dating to about 2,500 years ago, suggesting medicinal or ritual use.⁸ These early records remind us that cannabis has long been seen as a plant medicine that should be used with care and respect.

What's New

Program updates

If you experience an unwanted reaction, adverse event, or want to file a product complaint related to cannabis or hemp products, OMCCR has added easy-to-find links on our homepage. Visit <https://health.hawaii.gov/medicalcannabis/> for more information.

OFFICE OF MEDICAL CANNABIS CONTROL & REGULATION (OMCCR)

[Report an Incident or Adverse Event](#)

[File a Complaint about Cannabis or Hemp Products](#)

HAWAII MEDICAL CANNABIS NEWSLETTER

Ask Malia

Dear Malia,

I recently obtained my 329 card as I was told by my doctor that medical cannabis would help my condition. I'm embarrassed to say, I don't know how to approach my older sister about my plans. I've heard her criticize medical cannabis patients and I'm not even sure how to begin the conversation. It's not like we're teenagers—we're in our 30s, but she's a very strict kind of person. Do you have any advice?

Thanks,

Younger Sister



Dear Younger Sister,

I'm glad that you have prioritized your health! It can be tough to discuss using medicine that many do not understand. Working with your provider is key, and I am so glad you are doing this.

When talking with your sister, approach the conversation like any other medical discussion. Share reliable, science-based information, such as OMCCR newsletters or peer-reviewed studies that show the therapeutic value of cannabis for your symptoms.

Let her know this is about treating a medical condition, not getting high. You can explain that there are FDA-approved cannabinoid medications, and that the cannabis plant includes non-intoxicating cannabinoids used for therapeutic purposes. Framing the conversation around medicine and science may help her better understand your treatment and be more open and supportive.

For many patients, it's tough to be open about medical cannabis use. Just know that the more you educate yourself (you're reading the newsletter—great start!), the better you will be able to discuss it.



Take care,
Malia

HAWAII MEDICAL CANNABIS

NEWSLETTER

In the community

The OMCCR recently attended the Hawai'i Active Senior Fair, where we delivered two educational talks on the endocannabinoid system and engaged with hundreds of kūpuna—some current patients and many who were just beginning to learn about medical cannabis. A cannabinoid nurse was onsite to answer individual questions, joined by a senior patient volunteer who shared her personal experience with medical cannabis. We also connected with community organizations dedicated to protecting and enhancing the quality of life for Hawai'i's kūpuna, strengthening partnerships that support patient education and well-being.



OMCCR staff, cannabinoid nurse educator Wendy Gibson-Viviani, PTA, RN, BSN, and a kūpuna learning about the safe use of medical cannabis



Kūpuna gather around the booth to learn more about medical cannabis

Upcoming

OMCCR is excited to introduce know before you grow, a free educational workshop for Hawai'i's medical cannabis patients and caregivers. This event provides foundational knowledge on how to safely and legally cultivate, harvest, and cure your medical cannabis plants, while also emphasizing the therapeutic benefits of gardening. Participants will gain hands-on skills to grow plants in ways that support both mind and body.

Be on the lookout for an upcoming invitation to our Kona event on March 7, 2026. Our Hilo event will follow on April 18, 2026. Stay tuned for additional neighbor island dates.

OMCCR event on Big Island, Kona



Saturday, March 7th

HAWAII MEDICAL CANNABIS NEWSLETTER

FREE Continuing Medical Education (CME)

The Hawai'i Department of Health, OMCCR is offering healthcare professionals FREE continuing medical education (CME) on medical cannabis. There's only a few FREE CMEs left. Have your providers sign up before it's gone.

It's important for **all clinicians**, not only certifying medical providers, to understand both cannabis use and risks. Such knowledge enables providers to engage in informed, non-judgmental conversations with patients, recognize potential health effects, and guide appropriate care. Misinformation and the stigma around cannabis remain common, underscoring the need for accurate, evidence-based guidance. Our goal is to equip all healthcare professionals with the knowledge to better serve patients and the broader community.

This is a great opportunity for certifying providers, PCPs, or treating physicians to learn more about how medical cannabis can help patients, and how they can guide patients to use it safely and effectively.

Details here: [CME/CE Flyer](#). There's only a few FREE CMEs left. Have your providers sign up before it's gone.

<https://health.hawaii.gov/medicalcannabisregistry/files/2025/08/Provider-CME-Flyer-DOH-website-1.pdf>

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The information provided in this newsletter is for educational and informational purposes only and is provided as part of OMCCR's public education mandate. It is intended to keep qualifying medical cannabis patients informed about Hawai'i cannabis regulations, policies, and related topics. While we strive to ensure accurate and up-to-date content, the information may not reflect the most current legal standards or scientific research. Readers are encouraged to consult official government sources, legal professionals, or medical professionals for specific advice or guidance regarding cannabis use and regulations. The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the State of Hawai'i or the Department of Health.