



Background and Purpose

California's recent legalization of the cultivation, distribution and sale of cannabis for adult use has important health and health equity implications. Health equity is achieved when everyone has fair access to what they need for optimal health and well-being, regardless of their social status. In the context of cannabis regulation, health equity would require a fair distribution of the health risks and benefits of commercial cannabis. Since no commercial cannabis operations are permitted without authorization through local ordinances and regulations, local authorities play a pivotal role in ensuring that these local policies minimize harms to community health and promote health equity.

The LA County Board of Supervisors (Board) instructed the LA County Department of Public Health (DPH) to conduct an assessment of the health equity impacts of cannabis regulation in LA County so that any future regulations are informed by a consideration of these impacts. Health Impact Assessment (HIA) estimates the potential impacts of pending policy decisions on population health and health equity. For this HIA, the targeted policy decisions are those that would be made by an LA County Cannabis Commission, if such a Commission were to be established by the Board. The LA County Office of Cannabis Management has proposed a specific set of duties and functions for this Commission. This HIA is designed to inform cannabis regulation in unincorporated areas over which the Board has land use jurisdiction, as well as other LA County jurisdictions (i.e., cities). The overarching **goals of the HIA** are as follows:

- Estimate the health and health equity impacts of potential medicinal and adult use cannabis policies and regulations in unincorporated LA County and other LA County jurisdictions.
- Provide guidance for a proposed LA County Cannabis Commission so that its regulatory decisions and policy recommendations reflect a careful consideration of health and health equity.
- Advance evidence-based, health-protecting cannabis business and regulatory practices in unincorporated LA County and other LA County jurisdictions.
- Lay the groundwork for ongoing monitoring of health impacts to inform continuous improvement of cannabis policies and regulations in LA County.

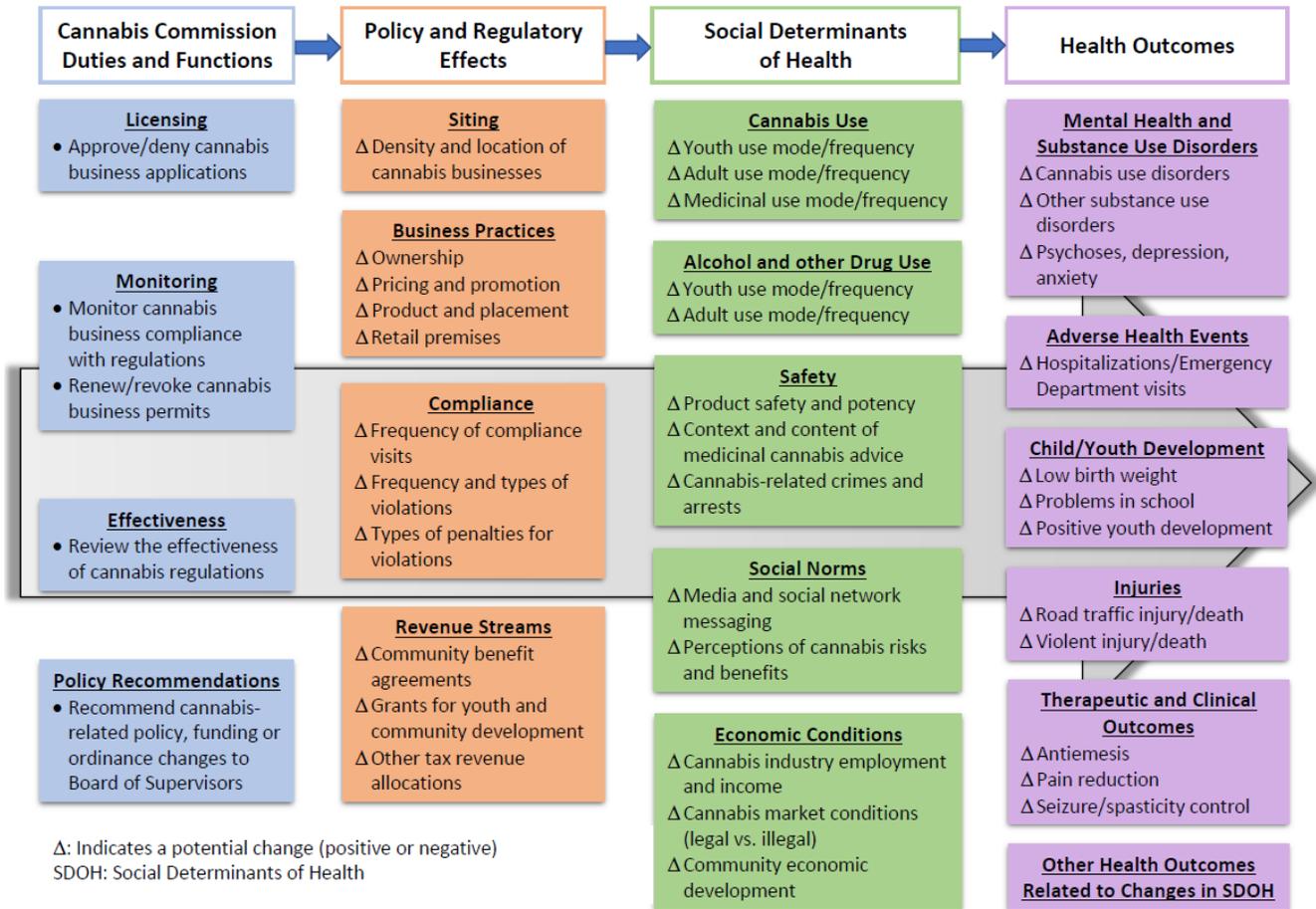
Analytic Approach and Research Questions

Conducted by DPH's Center for Health Impact Evaluation (CHIE) with expert input from an Advisory Group of stakeholders representing public agencies, non-profit organizations, and academia, this HIA is guided by the conceptual framework depicted in **Figure 1**. The framework links the proposed Cannabis Commission's duties, functions and associated policy and regulatory actions to social and environmental determinants that shape population health outcomes. The primary **research questions** of this HIA are embedded in the conceptual framework and seek to clarify how the four categories of policy and regulatory actions may impact equity in the distribution of social determinants of health (SDOH) and health outcomes:

1. How would cannabis *business locations and density* impact equity in the distribution of SDOH and health outcomes in unincorporated LA County and other LA County jurisdictions?
2. How would cannabis *business practices* impact equity in the distribution of SDOH and health outcomes in unincorporated LA County and other LA County jurisdictions?
3. How would *enforcement of compliance* with business regulations impact equity in the distribution of SDOH and health outcomes in unincorporated LA County and other LA County jurisdictions?
4. What uses of *cannabis tax revenues* would have the greatest impact on equity in the distribution of cannabis-related SDOH and health outcomes in unincorporated LA County and other LA County jurisdictions?



**Figure 1: Cannabis Regulation in Los Angeles County
Health Impact Assessment Conceptual Framework**



Methods

CHIE staff will use quantitative and qualitative methods to draw evidence-based conclusions about the direction and magnitude of changes in SDOH and health outcomes associated with changes in policy and regulatory effects. We are conducting thorough reviews of research literature; key informant interviews with cannabis business owners, city regulators, and physicians; and focus groups with affected residents and medicinal and recreational cannabis users. We are analyzing quantitative data from a variety of sources to establish historical and baseline conditions on indicators of the policy and regulatory factors, SDOH, and health outcomes included in the conceptual framework. These quantitative data are also being used to study the relationships among elements in the framework. We are also conducting an observational survey of cannabis dispensaries. The findings of this HIA will be used to develop evidence-based and practical recommendations in support of the HIA goals listed above. Preliminary findings of the HIA will be presented to the Advisory Group in early 2019.

For more information on the HIA’s goals, methods, and progress, please contact Emily Caesar (ecaesar@ph.lacounty.gov).