

# Parity for Patients Coalition Demands Protections for Medical Cannabis Patients

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[Honolulu, Hawai‘i, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020] – A diverse coalition of medical cannabis patients, medical professionals, advocacy organizations, dispensaries, and others are calling on Hawai‘i Governor David Ige and the Hawai‘i Department of Health to enact special rules to allow the curbside pick-up of medical cannabis and the certification of new medical cannabis patients via tele-health.

"I check all the boxes when it comes to vulnerability to COVID-19. I am 67 years old, I live with an immunodeficiency disease, and I have battled cancer for years. My only option to get my medicine is to leave my house where I feel safe, go to the dispensary with other people and employees and possibly expose myself to this virus. I feel like the government doesn't care about how dangerous that is," said Brad Lum from Honolulu. Brad is one of the many growing numbers of patients calling on Governor Ige and the Department of Health to protect 329 patients as a part of the *Parity for Patients Coalition*.

In support of the state's nearly 28,000 medical cannabis patients, the state's eight licensed dispensaries asked the governor and Health Director Bruce Anderson for temporary regulatory approval to allow for curbside pickup for registered patients using dispensaries. Curbside service and/or home delivery has been approved in 24 of 25 medical cannabis states during the COVID-19 crisis. Hawai‘i remains the *only* state in the nation that requires patients to enter a dispensary to access their medication.

"At a time when the healthcare system is already strained, it is vital for states to do everything they can to make sure medical cannabis patients can access their medicine in the safest possible manner," said Morgan Fox, spokesperson for the National Cannabis Industry Association. "Implementing policies that improve access and public safety - including extending telemedicine to medical cannabis and allowing curbside pickup - will protect our most at-risk patients and ease their suffering while helping to flatten the curve and prevent further infection."

With a lower rate of infection than many other states, Hawai‘i could be seen as a safer environment for the elderly and immunocompromised, but reopening the economy means easing current social distancing restrictions, This will increase risk to the islands' most vulnerable citizens.

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“Hawai‘i is discussing a phased-in reopening that could very well heighten the risk of a coronavirus surge,” said Greg Rowland, another registered medical patient from Waimānalo, ‘Oahu. “For older patients with underlying conditions like myself, we want a safer option like we have for grocery or prescriptions that can be delivered to our cars.”

On March 20, 2020, Governor Ige signed executive order 20-01 to permit the practice of telehealth without an in-person consultation or a prior existing physician-patient relationship. He also suspended a portion of the state’s controlled substance law to allow physicians to prescribe narcotics — classified as Schedule-2, Schedule-3, Schedule-4 and Schedule-5 — using telemedicine, even if the physicians had never met or examined the patient in person. The order excluded would-be medical cannabis patients who are still required to see a physician or APRN, in person, to be certified to use medical cannabis in Hawai‘i.

“Neglect of the executive order to include the 329 D-126 medical cannabis law is causing unnecessary suffering to the people of our state” said Jim Berg, MD, a medical cannabis certifying doctor on Hawai‘i Island. “A patient with cancer cannot legally gain access to their effective medicine for nausea while on chemotherapy even though they qualify and have a sincere doctor willing to qualify them; Nor can a patient with lupus, for their severe pain, or a patient with seizures for their epilepsy. Their suffering is real and you can help to relieve it by suspending 329-126 to allow telemedicine for new medical cannabis patients.”

Governor Ige and the Health Director Bruce Anderson have been aware of this issue for over a month. Both have been asked multiple times by physicians and dispensaries for additional measures to be implemented to protect patients. Each request has been denied with inadequate explanation, leaving thousands of vulnerable medical cannabis patients facing tough decisions regarding their health and wellness.

[According to the CDC](#), by definition medical cannabis patients are at high risk for severe illness if exposed to COVID-19. As of the first week in May, Hawai‘i remains the only state in the nation with a medical cannabis program that has not implemented special rules to protect medical cannabis patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The Parity for Patients Coalition is a group of patients, medical professionals, organizations, medical cannabis dispensaries, and advocates demanding equal access and protections for medical cannabis patients in Hawai‘i.