

THE CANNABIS CONNECTION

*Your information link to Missouri's
Division of Cannabis Regulation (DCR)*






MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH &
SENIOR SERVICES**

Division of Cannabis Regulation



JANUARY 2025

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A New Year in Cannabis

Author: Amy Moore, Director



As the calendar rolls over to a new year, I wanted to take a moment to reflect back over 2024 and look forward to what may be on the horizon for 2025. In 2024, our division continued to build our teams and refine processes, met new packaging and labeling process deadlines, issued recalls to protect public health, completed the second round of microbusiness applications and licensing, held licensee workshops, and hosted research license listening sessions. These efforts were underway all while working on strategic plans and cultural transformation for our division and the rest of the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS). And those highlights are just a sampling of another year full of change and growth.

The new year is likely to be no different in terms of change and growth. We are working on several potential rule changes or additions, anticipating additional microbusiness facilities coming online, looking forward to progress on a research facility license, watching carefully to see what responsibilities may be given to DHSS for regulation of hemp-derived cannabinoids or due to federal cannabis rescheduling efforts, planning for new outreach and communication avenues, continuing our progress in building our teams and processes, and much more.

At DCR, we recognize that change is not just a temporary phase in our world, but is inherent in the careers we have all chosen – this is likely a constant for all of us for many years to come. We are learning to acknowledge and embrace this reality. To the extent our readers are relating to this sentiment, please never hesitate to connect with us on this common ground. We are aware any change we’re dealing with is likely a change that affects our entire community. I am confident that with effective collaboration and some mutual support, all of us riding these waves of change and growth will be better able to succeed in doing so.

Wishing everyone a happy and healthy start to the new year!

Amy Moore

Tell us something good!

We love to hear from licensees. Is your business doing something innovative, interesting or new that you would like to share with us?

Email Tara McKinney, public outreach director, at tara.mckinney@health.mo.gov and we may contact you for an in-person meeting to hear more about it!

**HAPPY
NEW
YEAR!**

Thank you, Andrea!

Author: Amy Moore, Director

After nearly six years of meeting challenge after challenge with impressive success, Andrea Balkenbush has retired from the Division of Cannabis Regulation. There are not enough words to adequately recognize Andrea for her contribution to Missouri's cannabis regulatory program. She joined this program as its project director on Feb. 4, 2019, playing a critical role in the creation and development of the original Section for Medical Marijuana. She was promoted to director of the Section of Compliance and Enforcement on Nov. 7, 2019, and then division deputy director of what is now the Division of Cannabis Regulation on June 16, 2023. Throughout the years, Andrea's dedication and perseverance has been nothing short of extraordinary. Her ability to power through a steady stream of complex problem-solving, all while investing time and care in the people who depended on her, has been invaluable and left a lasting impact on who we have become as a program and a team.

To me, Andrea has been a friend and partner in an extraordinary journey. I'm so grateful we were paired up in those early days, and I wish her all the best in her new adventures.

*Thank you,
Andrea!*



New Deputy Director

Author: Amy Moore, Director

Please join me in welcoming Erica Ziegler to her role as the Division of Cannabis Regulation's new deputy director! As many of you may know, Erica has been with Missouri's cannabis program from the beginning, joining our team in the Spring of 2019 as the patient services director for the medical program. She built that side of our operation from scratch while simultaneously meeting the program's first big constitutional deadline. She's led with creativity and grace through growth and transition ever since.

Erica has been at the forefront of many of our biggest intra-division collaborations and external projects, especially during our transition to becoming a division and the implementation of the adult use cannabis program. Her dedication to our program, knowledge and expertise and deep interest in people – their wellbeing and success – will be so helpful in continuing to reach our goals. Erica began her new role on Jan. 16. Feel free to reach out to congratulate her or introduce yourself at any time.



"Throughout the past five years leading efforts in our continued program implementation, I have been fortunate to be part of our team and remain proud of our accomplishments in building the Missouri cannabis program. As I step into the role of deputy director, I look forward to leading efforts across the division to create best practices in efficient, effective standard processes, utilizing the talents and expertise of our staff, and meeting our shared goals together."

- Erica Ziegler

Fingerprint Submissions

Authors: Amber Sims, Coordinator and Shayna Arndt, Deputy Director, Section for Patient and Application Services

Fingerprint Submissions for State and Federal Criminal History Background Checks Agent ID Applicants and Active ID Cardholders

Following the FBI's approval of the department's authority to conduct state and federal criminal background checks on Dec. 2, 2024, DCR resumed fingerprint submission requirements of all new and renewing Agent ID applicants. The department received a new four-digit code for fingerprint submissions. The code previously used for the medical program is no longer valid.

The rule requirement in 19 CSR 100-1.070(2)(E) states that all Agent ID applicants must submit fingerprints for both state and federal criminal background checks to screen for disqualifying felony offenses.

After submitting an Agent ID application, DCR will send an email directly to the applicant with the new four-digit code and instructions for submitting fingerprints. Applicants are required to submit fingerprints within 14-days from the email notification date. To reduce processing timeframes, applicants should follow the instructions provided and notify DCR once fingerprint submission is complete. Applications are considered incomplete until fingerprint results are received. If fingerprints are not submitted within the 14-day timeframe, the application will be denied.

Active Agent ID Cardholders approved Dec. 8, 2022 - Dec. 1, 2024:

In early February 2025, DCR will begin requiring fingerprint submissions for active agent ID cardholders who were not previously required to provide fingerprints at time of application. Specifically, this includes individuals with agent ID cards approved between Dec. 8, 2022 – Dec. 1, 2024. Additional information and guidance will be posted on DCR's website prior to the February 2025 timeframe.

Important for Applicants/Cardholders:

- Do not submit fingerprints before receiving email from cannabisinfo@health.mo.gov with further instructions.
- Submitting fingerprints prior to receiving the email will not expedite processing.
- The department's authority to receive fingerprint-based criminal history background checks is strictly limited to individuals subject to the analysis of a disqualifying felony offense.
- Distribution of the four-digit code or fingerprint instructions outside the intended recipient is prohibited.
- Fingerprint submissions will be retained by both the state central repository and the FBI, and may be compared to other fingerprints in their database, including latent fingerprints.
- Additionally, fingerprint submissions will be enrolled in the National Rap Back Program, where they may continue to be compared with future fingerprint submissions or latent prints retained by the FBI.
- Additional information and guidance regarding the fingerprint submission requirement for active agent card holders will be posted on DCR's website in advance of the February timeframe.

IMPORTANT

Fingerprint Submissions, continued

Overview of Application Processing

Once an Agent ID application is submitted to the department:

- DCR processes applications in the order received.
- DCR sends the application back in the form of a “rejection” to request fingerprints.
- If there are other corrections needed, those details will be included in the rejection and must be corrected before resubmitting.
- The rejection notice will be sent to the email address the applicant uses to log into the online registry portal.
- A follow-up email will be sent from CannabisInfo@health.mo.gov after the rejection, with specific instructions for submitting fingerprints.
- Applicants will have 14 days to complete the following:
 - o Submit fingerprints
 - o Make needed corrections (if any)
 - o Resubmit their application and
 - o Reply to the email from Cannabisinfo@health.mo.gov with their assigned fingerprint submission TCN.



Applicants and active cardholders should regularly check the email used to log into the online registry portal for updates and instructions from DCR regarding fingerprint submission requirements.

For more details, please visit our website at Cannabis.Mo.Gov. The Individual Licensing Unit (ILU) is available to assist with application questions. You can reach the ILU by email at CannabisInfo@health.mo.gov or by phone at 866-219-0165, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. CST.

Item Approval Update

Justin Smith, Unit Manager, Compliance Assessment Unit

The item approval process has been in place since Sept. 1, 2023. Prior to implementation, it was difficult to plan for all the challenges that would be encountered. Through re-evaluation of our processes and regular communication with licensees, there continues to be evolution. This growth includes a focus on proficiency, efficiency and compliance. One area where the division continues to seek improvement is in providing additional resources for licensees to navigate the item approval process.

In the time leading up to the item approval process going into effect, our team has been working diligently to make sure we are able to review every item submitted within the 60-day timeframe outlined in rule. We have also been reviewing our own processes and collecting data and feedback from industry stakeholders. Through these efforts and collection of information from licensees, we have been able to better meet the needs of the industry while maintaining an effective level of review for each item submitted. One change was the implementation of template and template-based items. These templates and template-based items allow a licensee to work with staff on a template for packaging, then apply the same design, label, updates, etc. to multiple items without having to go through the same level of submittal and review for every item available.

Another improvement implemented during the last year was the unique procedure for submitting deli-style flower items. Several areas of rule include an exception for deli-style operations as this process is different from the process for all other final item types. Considering this unique circumstance and concerns expressed by industry, this process was refined to ensure compliance while meeting the needs of the licensee. Early feedback from licensees has been mainly positive and suggests these changes were effective.

Much of our team has been in their role as a facility specialist for over a year and have become extremely knowledgeable in this field. The team has adapted with the external changes noted above, as well with the internal review process changes that have been refined over time. Going through this process as a team has resulted in a strong, cohesive unit with a positive culture that is always up for a challenge. This team of specialists has kept up with the hundreds of thousands of items submitted over the last 15 months and has done so with grace and effectiveness. While we are still working towards the goal to reduce the timeframe to review times, our overall number of items pending review has steadily dropped from a peak of over 85,000 items to just over 30,000. These pending item numbers should continue to fall reducing overall review times.

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Item Approval Update, continued

The Item Approval Applications Dashboard shows processing information, including the number of applications received per quarter, average days to approve and more. It can be found at <https://health.mo.gov/safety/cannabis/stats.php>.

Since June 2023, we have developed multiple process documents, FAQs and guidance documents for packaging and labeling. These are available on our website at <https://health.mo.gov/safety/cannabis/facility-comms-guidance.php>. In the near future, we expect to finalize a more refined packaging, labeling and design guide that will further enhance licensees' experience.

We would not be where we are today without all the help and collaboration along the way. I feel very fortunate to be able to work with such a talented, enthusiastic and loyal group of employees. There have also been DCR employees from multiple sections and units that have lent a helping hand to the Product Compliance Team to ensure deadlines are being met. Between Sept. 1, 2023, and Dec. 13, 2024, the team reviewed 305,924 items, with 225,163 being approved, 41,671 denied and 39,007 still pending in the review process.

As we have moved past the packaging deadline, there are still many hurdles to overcome, and improvements that can be made, but we survived an intense year of working on a plane that was already in flight. There is a lot of work ahead for this team. Having laid out a strong foundation, our future work will be to hone in on what is already there to shorten review times and improve resources for a more consistent process. This will ultimately result in more compliant packaging and labeling throughout Missouri.

Microbusiness Rule Revision

Author: Lesley Turek, Chief Equity Officer

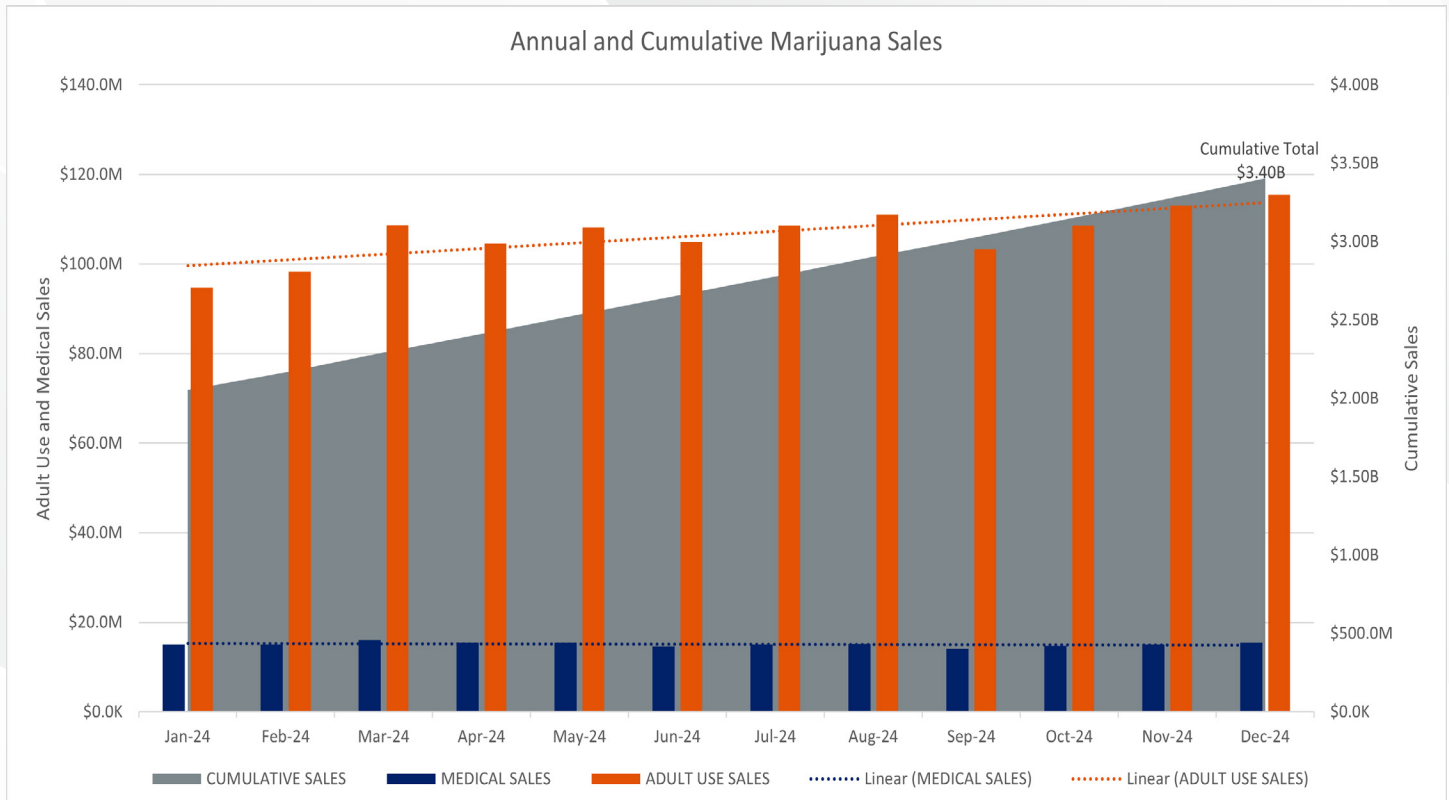
Following the first two rounds of microbusiness licensing, staff at DCR has collaborated to create a draft of microbusiness rule revisions to 19 CSR 100-1.060 and 19 CSR 100-1.190. The revisions were posted for public feedback through Jan. 6, 2025.

The revisions are intended to ensure microbusiness licenses are issued to eligible individuals, as required by Article XIV of the Missouri Constitution, and to address the trend of predatory arrangements in microbusiness licensing. Specifically, these draft rule revisions should mitigate the ongoing efforts of ineligible entities to acquire licenses by taking advantage of eligible individuals.

Microbusiness licenses are marijuana facility licenses that are only issued to eligible individuals and are designed to provide a path to legal marijuana facility ownership for individuals who might not otherwise easily access that opportunity. Article XIV is clear that microbusiness licenses must be owned and operated by eligible individuals. A purported owner with little to no knowledge, control, agency or decision-making authority in an application or license does not meet the intent or meaning of the requirement in Article XIV.

2024 Data

Missouri 2024 Marijuana Sales



Check out the [DCR Data & Reports website for more!](#)

Dashboards, Data, and Reports

- Patient, Caregiver, & Consumer Information
- Total Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Cumulative Marijuana Sales
- Business Change Application Dashboard
- Commencement Inspection Requests Dashboard
- Item Approval Applications Dashboard
- Annual Report to the Governor
- Chief Equity Officer Report

2024 Help Line Stats

Call Center:	
Staff Answered Calls	8,063
Interactive Voice Recognition	4,789
Total:	12,852

2024 Email Stats

Email Inquiry Responses:	9,633
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2024 Reflections!

Accomplishments from the Executive Team

Author: Executive Team

As 2024 drew to an end, we asked the section directors to reflect on the successes or accomplishments of their teams over the year. This is not an all-inclusive list of all the hard work that DCR team members do every day, but it does encompass a few highlights of what they had to say.

Craig Schneiders

Office of Operational Support

- Rebuilding of the operations team. Due to retirements and other turnover, there were a number of vacancies in key positions that needed to be filled. These have been largely filled including two by promotion from within.
- Development of a more streamlined process for the Division's Annual Report so program teams can more accurately be aware of their roles and deliver their contributions in a more timely manner.
- Met the deadline for the Continuity of Operations (COOP) plan. The COOP is still undergoing modifications that will reflect DCR's transition from a section to its own division.

Erica Ziegler

Section for Patient and Application Services

Individual Licensing Unit

- Resumed Agent ID card fingerprint submission requirement.
- Call center hours expanded hours of operation 5 days a week, 9am – 4pm.
- State-wide Customer Service Leadership Training.
- Assisted SCE product labeling efforts.
- Cultivation ID Card Holder Public Communications Efforts – Newsletter/Podcast.

Facility Application Services Unit

- Round 2 Microbusiness Application and Licensing.
- Round 2 Microbusiness Refunds issued.
- Processing Annual Payments and Renewals.
- FAS restructure, adding 2 new supervisors.

Jennifer Zamkus

Section for Compliance and Enforcement

- Developed many internal and public facing dashboards, including sales data, average processing time for business change applications, commencement inspections, and item approval processing.
- Added an online interactive Missouri Dispensary Licensee Location Directory to assist patients and consumers with identifying and locating licensed dispensaries in their area.
- Fully staffed the Bureau of Investigations and Enforcement (BIE) Track and Trace Team. This team has implemented processes to identify concerning trends and partnered with Bureau of Facility Compliance (BFC) team members and BIE investigators to conduct site visits and inventories.
- During 2024, this team created and presented training on the seed to sale tracking system (Metr) for BFC compliance team members and BIE investigators.
- Completed Minimum Standards and Eligibility Review for the second round of microbusiness applications.
- Engaged in ongoing licensee education through in-person workshops held throughout the state, online licensee learning sessions, and Microbusiness Welcome Meetings.



What are some team successes or accomplishments that you are most proud of in 2024?

Meet our team

WE ARE DCR



Kourtney Blomberg

Manager, Bureau of Investigations and Enforcement



I've worked for the State of Missouri for almost 14 years. I began as an eligibility specialist determining benefits for Missouri citizens. I took the policy knowledge I gained in this position to Welfare Fraud Unit (WIU) as an investigator. After a few years at WIU, I found an opportunity to join the Workers' Compensation Fraud Unit and eventually joined Department of Health and Senior Services.

I began my time with DCR as a compliance officer dedicated to investigations and was promoted to bureau manager for the Bureau of Investigations and Enforcement. Being part of developing this program has been such a challenge and great reward. Ensuring that patients and consumers can have faith in the safety of the products they are purchasing is paramount to our program's success. I am thankful to be part a great team that is dedicated to maintaining the integrity of the program.

Rebecca Jackson

Program Coordinator, Office of Operational Support, Planning Unit

I'm so happy to be here and to be a part of the DCR family! As the operations planning unit coordinator, my team's job is to coordinate long-term projects, meet Missouri Constitutional requirements such as the compilation of the Annual Report, streamline internal processes, and provide operational support throughout the division to enable other team members to focus on serving the citizens of Missouri.

I am a native of Missouri, growing up in the St. Louis suburbs and earning my bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Missouri. But, I spent 20 years as a military spouse, Department of Defense (DoD) Contractor, and DoD Civilian Employee. When my husband retired from the military three years ago, we "beat feet" back home to Missouri and I began my career with the State of Missouri within the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development.

Outside of work, my hubby and I run a non-profit supporting combat veterans and first responders struggling with Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) and depression. We provide teamwork, comradery and re-acclimation to adrenaline in a positive environment through endurance auto racing.

I'm happy to be home and it is an honor to serve!



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[Cannabis.Mo.Gov](https://cannabis.mo.gov)



Check out our [monthly podcast](#) to hear about what's happening around DCR! If you have a topic that you would like us to feature reach out to Tara McKinney at tara.mckinney@health.mo.gov.

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