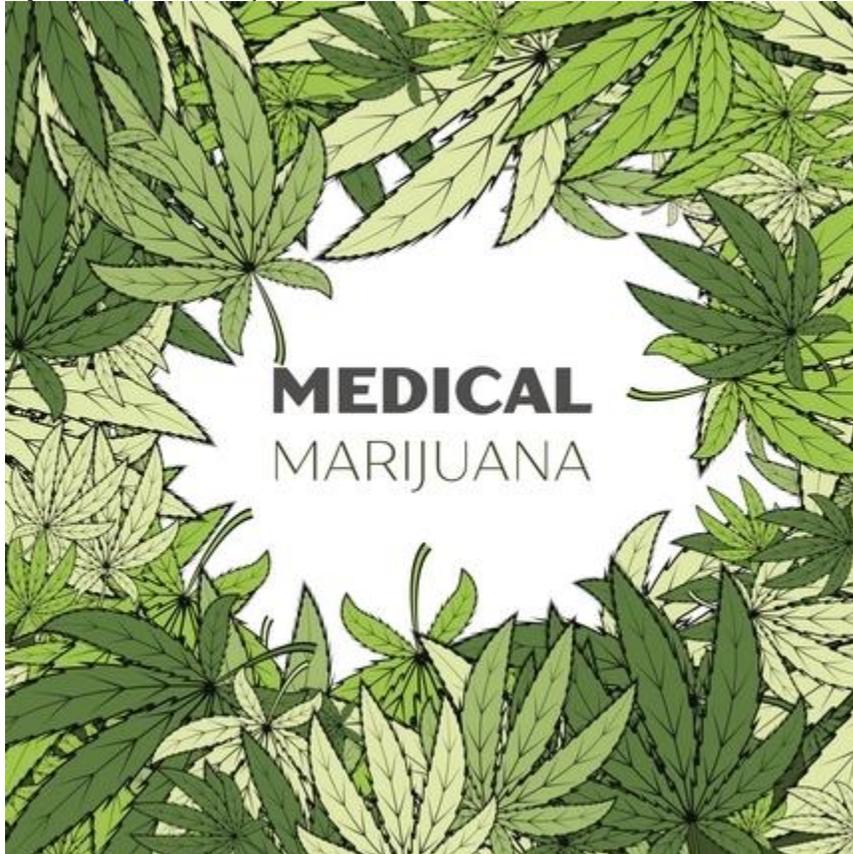


# Medical marijuana: One year later

By [Lenay Ruhl](#), April 17, 2017 at 3:00 AM



(Photo / ThinkStock)

Medical marijuana was legalized in Pennsylvania a year ago Monday with the swipe of Gov. Tom Wolf's pen, giving birth to a new industry.

Since that historic moment in Harrisburg, industry stakeholders have been hard at work.

Entrepreneurs have created businesses to grow, process and dispense medical marijuana, and they have been looking for real estate across Central Pennsylvania, including in [Dauphin](#), [Lancaster](#) and [York](#) counties.

Local [municipalities](#), meanwhile, have paving the way for medical marijuana facilities to come in, fine-tuning zoning laws and identifying potential locations.

Longstanding midstate companies have invested in new business ventures to serve the cannabis market, while other industries, such as banking and [insurance](#), have been looking for ways to meet the demands of new customers.

Most eyes, however, have been on the Pennsylvania Department of Health, which formed a team to develop regulations for medical marijuana.

In the past year the agency hired John Collins to oversee the program and written regulations for growers, processors, dispensaries, laboratories and physicians. It also released a safe harbor provision allowing children to begin using medical marijuana ahead of the final regulatory framework, and it's prepared to license medical marijuana businesses this summer.

"As long as they keep on what they're keeping on, everything's going to be good," said Russ Cersosimo, director of strategic alliances for the Pennsylvania Medical Cannabis Society.

## Summer to bring grower, processor, dispensary licenses

January represented a major milestone for the state when the [application process opened](#), and for the first time businesses could put down money to pursue a spot growing, processing or dispensing medical marijuana in Pennsylvania.

The application process closed March 20, and the department is currently reviewing applications.

The department has not yet released any details about how many applications it received or from whom, but it plans to give out the number of applications received by the end of April, according to department spokeswoman April Hutcheson.

The department originally predicted it would receive about 900 applications, and that it would take 90 days to review them and decide on licenses. The 90-day timeline is still accurate, Hutcheson said Friday.

So far, the department has been good about sticking to its timeline, according to Cersosimo.

"I think everything's on pace for opening the doors in early to mid-2018," Cersosimo said, adding that as long as the department announces license approvals in June, the timing shouldn't change.

Others, such as Andrew Blasco, executive director of the Pennsylvania Medical Cannabis Industry Group, also are confident in the program's progress.

"The state has, time and again, given itself deadlines which it has consistently met," Blasco said.

Blasco expects licenses to be approved in July, and believes that very soon, the department will disclose the applicants – who they are, how many applications were submitted and where they are in the state.

The department has divided the state into [six regions](#). It plans to approve 12 grower/processor licenses and 27 dispensary licenses.

The midstate is slated to get at least four dispensaries and maybe two grower/processor facilities.

## **Next up: physicians and patients**

The department also is collecting input from physicians on temporary regulations it released on April 11.

The rules offer guidance for physicians who want to register with the medical marijuana program.

Physicians will need to provide their names, business addresses, medical license numbers and contact information for listing in an online registry.

Physicians will also have to complete a four-hour medical marijuana training course before being included in the registry or working at a dispensary, the regulations said.

The first draft of physician regulations, which is posted on the department's website, is open for comment through April 20.

The next steps are finalizing physician regulations, writing patient regulations and building the seed-to-sale contract, which is the IT system that will track medical marijuana from seed to sale. The IT system will also serve as a registry for patients and practitioners, Hutcheson said.