

PORTLAND OREGONIAN

A SMOKESCREEN FOR CRIMINALS

Police estimate 40 percent of medical marijuana growers break the law, but patient advocates say it's just a few and the real issue is lack of supply

Oregon's medical marijuana program has grown colossally in recent years, with autumn harvests so robust it scarcely resembles the modest enterprise approved by voters in 1998.

The Oregon Medical Marijuana Act was sold to voters nine years ago with the prediction that about 500 people a year would apply to get relief from debilitating conditions such as cancer, glaucoma, HIV and multiple sclerosis.

Today, the program has swelled to 14,831 patients, with 1,700 filing new or renewal applications each month, including a few diagnosed with common afflictions such as asthma, back pain and menstrual cramps.

An additional 7,178 medical marijuana cardholders are caregivers who assist patients. Lawmakers updated the program two years ago, adding a new class of third-party growers who now number more than 4,000.

The explosive growth of the Oregon Medical Marijuana Program, coupled with mass cultivation and the seduction of selling cannabis on the black market for \$2,500 a pound and higher, also has provoked extensive abuse.

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