

Appendix. Consolidated Subject Matter Expert (SME) Interview Guide

Purpose

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) across multiple sectors to understand perceived impacts of Proposition 64 on cannabis use, access, public health, industry operations, and policy in California. All SMEs received a core set of general questions, followed by sector-specific probes.

I. General Questions (All SMEs)

1. Perceptions of Proposition 64

- What are your general perceptions of cannabis legalization in California?
- How has legalization affected your industry or line of work?

2. Sector-Level Impacts

- Since legalization, what changes have you observed related to cannabis use, access, regulation, or operations within your field?

3. Survey Input (Phase 2)

- What would you want included in our survey of 5,000 cannabis users?
- What would you personally be interested in learning from cannabis users?

4. Additional Recommended Participants

- Are there other SMEs you recommend we interview?

II. SME-Specific Question Sets

A. Primary Care & Clinical Providers

- Since legalization, have more patients initiated cannabis-related discussions?
- What questions or concerns do patients most commonly raise?
- How has legalization impacted your approach to history-taking, counseling, or comfort discussing cannabis?

- What health effects (positive or negative) have you observed among patients who use cannabis?

- Have you integrated cannabis into patient care? Why or why not?

B. Mental Health Providers & Addiction Specialists

- What changes have you observed in clients' cannabis use (motivation, reasons, patterns)?

- What mental or behavioral health effects have you observed?

- How has legalization influenced substance use patterns or high-risk behaviors?

- How has legalization affected harm-reduction vs abstinence-based approaches?

- Have you incorporated cannabis into treatment? Why or why not?

C. Drug Recognition Experts / Law Enforcement

- Changes in policies/procedures for cannabis-suspected traffic stops?

- Observed changes in DUIs, field sobriety testing, or prosecution?

- Patterns of co-occurring substance use?

- Any shifts in safety, resistance, or operational challenges?

D. Cannabis Users (Current or Former)

- Evolution of use over time (motivation, frequency, product type).

- Perceived benefits and drawbacks of use.

- Changes in access, location of use, or patterns since legalization.

- Factors influencing experiences (stigma, cost, transportation, social factors).

- Sources of information/guidance (providers, peers, dispensaries, online).

E. Dispensary Owners / Managers

- Changes in product offerings, potency, demand, or customer demographics.
- Most common consumer questions.
- Licensing, compliance, or operational challenges.
- Impact of state–federal regulatory inconsistencies (banking, safety, distribution).

F. Legal Professionals

- Changes in prosecution of new and prior cannabis-related cases.
- Legal or procedural complications since legalization.
- Perceived strengths and shortcomings of current cannabis laws.
- Impact of inconsistent state and federal regulations.

G. Cannabis Advocates

- How advocacy work has evolved since legalization.
- Key successes and shortcomings of Proposition 64.
- Expected/unexpected consequences.
- Recommended improvements for future legislation.
- Direction and priorities of cannabis advocacy.

III. Administration

- Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes.
- Conducted via Zoom with participant consent.
- Semi-structured format ensured consistent core questions with targeted probes for each SME category.

IV. Example Interview Excerpt (Expanded Sample)

Sample Excerpt (Primary Care Clinician Interview)

Interviewer:

"Thank you for joining us today. To get started, could you briefly describe your role as a clinician and the type of patients you primarily care for?"

Participant: [Provides background.]

Interviewer:

"Great, thank you. Now I'd like to talk about your experiences since cannabis legalization in California. Since Proposition 64 went into effect, have you noticed any changes in how often patients bring up cannabis during their visits?"

Participant: [Responds.]

Interviewer (follow-up):

"And when patients do raise the topic, what tends to be the focus—are they usually asking about medical benefits, safety, dosage, product types, or something else?"

Participant: [Responds.]

Interviewer:

"Have you found that there's any pattern in who brings it up? For example, is it more common among certain age groups, conditions, or patient populations?"

Participant: [Responds.]

Interviewer:

"Since legalization, do you find that *you* are more likely to ask about cannabis use as part of routine history-taking?"

Participant: [Responds.]

Interviewer (probe if applicable):

"And what factors influence whether you decide to explore it further—symptoms, medication interactions, patient interest, or something else?"

Transition to Knowledge & Comfort

Interviewer:

"I'd like to shift to your own comfort level discussing cannabis with patients. On a scale from 1 to 10, how comfortable do you feel talking about cannabis use?"

Participant: [Responds.]

Interviewer (if low–moderate comfort):

"What do you think contributes to that level of comfort? Is it uncertainty about the evidence, lack of training, concerns about legality, or something else?"

Interviewer (if high comfort):

"What factors make you feel more comfortable having these conversations—clinical experience, personal study, formal training, or something else?"

Interviewer:

"Related to that, how would you describe your current level of knowledge about cannabis products, potency, potential benefits, and potential harms?"

Participant: [Responds.]

Interviewer (follow-up):

"Do you feel equipped to provide guidance to patients who use cannabis alongside other medications or have chronic conditions?"

Clinical Observations

Interviewer:

"From your clinical experience, what physical, mental, or behavioral health effects have you observed among patients who use cannabis—either benefits or drawbacks?"

Interviewer (optional probes):

- "Have you observed issues such as anxiety, memory concerns, psychosis, or CHS?"
- "What about perceived benefits—sleep, appetite, pain reduction?"
- "Any changes in ER visits or acute care needs related to cannabis?"

Integration in Clinical Care

Interviewer:

"Have you taken any steps to integrate cannabis into your patient care—such as guidance for sleep, chronic pain, or harm reduction? If so, what does that look like in practice?"

Participant: [Responds.]

Interviewer:

"And if you have *not* integrated it, what factors influenced that decision?"

Closing Questions for Phase 2 Survey

Interviewer:

"In the next phase of our project, we will be surveying 5,000 cannabis users across California. From your perspective as a clinician, what types of questions would you like us to ask cannabis users?"

Participant: [Responds.]

Interviewer (follow-up):

"And is there anything you personally would like to learn from cannabis users—whether related to your practice or more broadly?"

Interviewer:

"Thank you—that's very helpful. Those are all the questions we have for today."