

# Do marijuana dispensaries increase neighborhood crime?

Researchers study Denver neighborhoods post 2014 legalization

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Ten states and the District of Columbia now allow the sale, possession and use of marijuana for recreational purposes, and 33 states and the District of Columbia allow medical marijuana. Critics argue that marijuana dispensaries are magnets for crime. A new study found an association between marijuana dispensaries and increases in rates of crime and disorder in neighborhoods in Denver, Colo., shortly after Colorado commenced legal retail sales of marijuana.

The study, by researchers at the University of Colorado Denver, appears in *Justice Quarterly*, a publication of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

“We found that neighborhoods with one or more medical or recreational dispensary saw increased crime rates that were between 26 and 1,452 percent higher than in neighborhoods without any commercial marijuana activity,” notes [Lorine A. Hughes](#), PhD, associate professor in the [School of Public Affairs](#) at the University of Colorado Denver, who led the study. “But we also found that the strongest associations between dispensaries and crime weakened significantly over time.”

# A spike in crime at cannabis dispensaries

Cash and cannabis make for tempting targets

Crime

By [Hanna Kang](#)

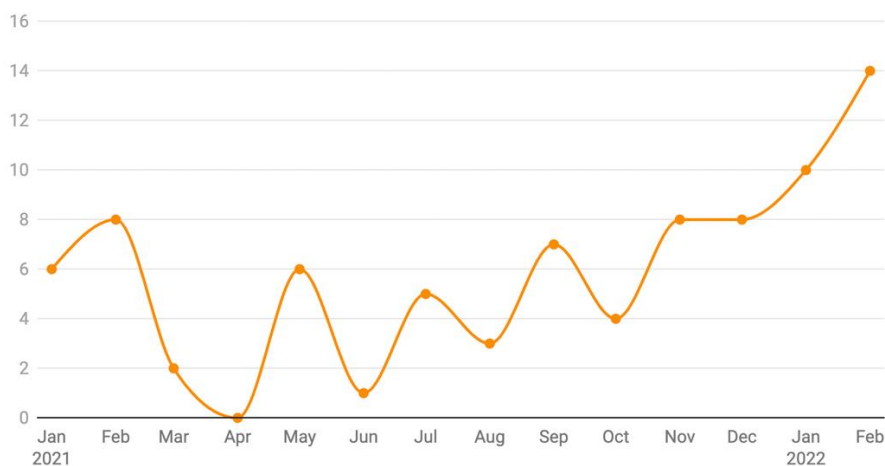
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Just before closing time on Feb. 13, three men and a woman walked into California Cannabis Melrose Dispensary in [Larchmont](#) posing as customers. Once inside, two of the men pulled out handguns and held a worker at gunpoint while the gang took cash from the register and grabbed product off the shelves. They tossed their haul into a waiting car and sped off.

A month prior on Jan. 11, burglars attempted to break into the same dispensary through the front door, but the alarm went off before they could bust their way inside. Virgil Grant, the dispensary owner, said he's heard from police and others that thieves are "specifically targeting cannabis dispensaries."

Over the past four months, there have been more reports of robberies, burglaries, assault with a deadly weapon and other crimes at Los Angeles dispensaries than during any other stretch since cannabis became available for retail sale four years ago. In the month of February, there were 14 reported crimes, the highest ever since 2018. January had 10 crimes, while November and December had eight each. In previous years, the average monthly number of crimes never reached five.

## Crime in cannabis dispensaries, Jan. 2021-Feb. 2022



Source: LAPD Crime Dataset