



The Commonwealth Project

Howard Kessler | Founder of The Commonwealth Project

Howard Kessler is an entrepreneur and philanthropist who has spent the past five years devoting himself to exploring how medical cannabis can revolutionize senior healthcare — driven by a compassionate desire to assist millions of older Americans facing increasingly complex health issues as they age. Drawing from his more than three decades of success at the forefront of the financial services industry, Kessler has fueled a philanthropic effort to radically transform the senior health care landscape, cultivating a diverse network of health service providers, medical experts, leading medical research institutions, and other high-level partners to bring life-changing alternative therapies to seniors.

Kessler first rose to prominence as an entrepreneur in the early 1980s after pioneering the first-ever co-branded credit card (“affinity credit card”) for MBNA. Kessler’s vision and leadership helped to build MBNA from its infancy through its sale to Bank of America for \$35B. Kessler spent the next three decades continuing to drive innovation in financial services as the head of the Kessler Group — a Boston-based firm founded by Kessler which has become the premier manager, advisor, and structuring partner to credit card issuers, banks, credit unions, and payment networks. Under Kessler’s leadership, the Kessler Group has become a one-of-a-kind industry leader that has shaped and transformed the payments industry.

Equally dedicated to philanthropic causes, Kessler founded the Kessler Family Foundation in 1994, primarily focusing on supporting educational, medical research, and human services endeavors. After experiencing first hand the obstacles in accessing modern quality healthcare for older adults, Kessler dedicated his life’s work toward pioneering a new, innovative approach to revolutionize the senior healthcare landscape — rooted in the belief that medical cannabis could be harnessed to not only provide older Americans with an alternative to traditional prescription painkillers but to reduce soaring health care costs saddling millions of seniors.

Since founding the Commonwealth Project in 2019, Kessler has drawn from his experience and connections as a finance innovator to work with our country’s federal government and healthcare industry to provide adults 65+ with safe access to cannabinoid-based therapies and redefine healthcare norms for senior wellness. In addition to partnering with prominent health care and medical leaders — like the Morehouse School of Medicine, the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, and the Satcher Health Leadership Institute — Kessler has helped to establish pilot programs at senior living facilities in Florida and New York, where medical cannabis was administered to residents by healthcare professionals. These pilot programs enabled experts to conduct first-of-its-kind, comprehensive studies into the use of medical cannabis in senior care. One of the studies found that more than 80 percent of participants showed a positive impact and nearly three-quarters said their cannabis was more cost-effective than their prescription drugs.

Kessler’s efforts — which are among the first to study the use of medical cannabis in senior care — are helping to grow widespread support amongst the medical and advocacy communities, prompting medical experts like Dr. Peter Grinspoon (Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School) and advocacy giants like LeadingAge — which represents 5,000 aging focused organizations — to partner with Kessler and the Commonwealth Project in developing evidence-based programs for the treatment of ailments in the over 65 patient population.

“The Commonwealth Project is a living example of that vision which is positively changing the Cannabinoid-Based Therapies landscape for our nation,” said Morehouse School of Medicine President Valerie Montgomery Rice, M.D. “We support your vision and mission to bring a more just and equitable reality to the world of medical cannabis research and access for the over 65 population.”

Daniel E. Dawes, a leading architect of the Affordable Care Act and the Founding Dean of the School of Global Public Health at Meharry Medical College said, “I saw first-hand [Kessler’s] mission to work with leaders in America’s healthcare space to find a national solution for access to Cannabinoid-based therapies for Americans 65+ ... I value your contributions to address some of the most pressing health issues impacting vulnerable, underserved, and marginalized populations, especially your focus on Americans 65+.”