



# The Commonwealth Project

## Our Work | 5+ Years Working to Revolutionize Senior Health Care

The Commonwealth Project (TCP) is working to prioritize the 65+ population by integrating medical cannabis into mainstream health care for seniors. Our efforts are driven by a compassionate desire to assist millions of seniors facing increasingly complex health issues as they age by 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, such as opioids, but to reduce soaring health care costs saddling millions of seniors.

Since founding the Commonwealth Project in 2019, entrepreneur and philanthropist Howard Kessler has drawn from more than three decades of experience at the forefront of the financial services industry to work with our country's federal government and healthcare leaders to revolutionize senior health care — by providing adults 65+ with safe access to cannabinoid-based therapies.

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 — TCP has helped to establish pilot programs at senior living facilities in Florida and offered support at others in New York, where medical cannabis based products were 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.

**Below is an overview of the Commonwealth Project's advances under Kessler's vision and leadership.**

### August 2019 | MorseLife Living Lab Pilot Program

- TCP partners with MorseLife Health System — a not-for-profit national leader in senior health serving more than 3,600 seniors on its campus in West Palm Beach and through its community outreach program — to create the Living Laboratory Project, enabling senior residents to access medical cannabis administered by a medical cannabis doctor on the campus.
- TCP and MorseLife conduct a comprehensive study of the medical use of cannabis-based therapies in senior care, administered by Dr. Melanie Bone. Findings include:
  - 82.6% of participants showed a positive impact
  - 74% said their cannabis was more cost effective than their prescription drug costs
  - 60% reported an “8” on a scale of 1 to 10 based on improvement of their ailment when using cannabis
  - 56% ceased taking higher risk pharmaceuticals (opioids, morphine)
  - Demonstrated the ability to increase appetite and improve sleep disorders

### August 2019 | Support from Leading Long-Term Care Advocates

- LeadingAge — representing 5,000 aging focused organizations — declares its support for The Commonwealth Project (TCP), and confirms it “will participate with the Kessler Research Foundation on your research program to develop evidence-based treatment programs designed to support the appropriate use of medicinal cannabis by physicians for the treatment of medical ailments in the over 65 patient population.”

### November 2019 | Morehouse Endocannabinoid System (ECS) Study

- Kessler Research Foundation develops partnership with Morehouse School of Medicine, providing financial support to conduct research and policy analysis activities within the cannabinoid and endocannabinoid spectrums, and to secure the appointment of a dedicated faculty member to research ECS.
- Morehouse School of Medicine President Valerie Montgomery Rice, M.D. said, “The Commonwealth Project is a living example of that vision which is positively changing the Cannabinoid-Based Therapies landscape for our nation.”

## **December 2019** | [Medical Advisory Board to TCP with Leading Health Experts Established](#)

- TCP establishes a Medical Advisory Board composed of respected industry leaders including [Dr. Elizabeth Nabel](#), [Dr. Ross Zafonte](#), [Dr. Michael Zinner](#), [Dr. Gary Nabel](#)

## **2019** | [The Hebrew Home of Riverdale](#)

- Kessler provides financial support to a 735-bed skilled nursing facility outside of NYC enabling senior residents to access cannabis-based therapies under New York state law (while the institution remains compliant with federal law), becoming the only senior living provider to offer medical cannabinoid treatments.
- “Our results have shown that cannabinoid-based therapies improve our residents’ medical conditions, reduce pain and anxiety, and reliance on opiates for pain medication. Utilizing cannabis therapies has an overall impact on improving seniors’ health span and outlook on their life.”

## **2020** | [TCP Pivots to Pandemic Relief Efforts](#)

- TCP pivots resources to encourage and promote healthy senior living during isolation, including the launch of TCP Healthcorps, where we established learning and sharing opportunities for retirement communities, entered into collaboration with Leading Age on developing a pandemic playbook for senior living, and created a barter system within senior living facilities to help with PPE shortages.

## **February 2021** | [Formation of Quality Assurance Committee](#)

- TCP’s Medical Advisory Board forms committee led by Dr. Elizabeth Nabel; Establishes best practices for the evaluation of CBT product manufacturers for TCP; Establishes product development standards

## **February 2021** | [Health Leaders Roundtable Convening](#)

- TCP convenes the Satcher Health Leadership Institute, Morehouse School of Medicine, and the Kessler Research Foundation for a town hall meeting on key policy actions and research impacting medical cannabis use in the U.S. and challenges and solutions for the 65+ population and underserved communities.

## **May 2021** | [Education Platform Launch](#)

- TCP creates telephone call center in partnership with Realm of Caring
- Online application, “Connect-Plan-Manage”, created in partnership with Validcare

## **May 2021** | [“Oncuity” is Created for TCP](#)

- Created for data collection and product development.

## **December 2021** | [National Safety Study with Validcare](#)

- TCP designs study to address FDA risk factors.
- Demonstrated the superior safety and efficacy of CBD sleep therapy developed by TCP.

## **2022** | [Regulatory & Governmental Outreach](#)

- TCP engages and meets with high-level federal and state public officials to determine a path forward on integrating medical cannabis into 65+ health care, including senior officials with:
  - Massachusetts governor’s office
  - U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services
  - U.S. Dept. of Labor
  - FDA

## **2023** | [Public & Media Interest Grows](#)

- TCP meets with key payers to discuss opportunities for Medicare coverage.
- TCP/MorseLife Living Lab in Florida is featured on Sanjay Gupta’s [CNN special](#) Cannabis and Seniors, underscoring the need for education for seniors and cannabis use.
- TCP engages with key expert advisors.
- TCP engages with key constituents to provide letters of support for TCP’s focus on 65+ and medical cannabis, including MeHarry University, DanaFarber, Realm of Caring, Morehouse School of Medicine, MorseLife Health System, River Spring Living, and Dr. Peter Grinspoon (Mass General, Instructor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School).

## 2023 | Continued Regulatory & Governmental Outreach

- TCP meets with high-level state and federal public officials, including senior leaders from:
  - Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)
  - Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI)
  - U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services
  - U.S. Senate Majority Leader's office
  - U.S. senators from Massachusetts
  - Massachusetts governor's office

## April 2023 | Kessler Research Grant Provided to Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

- Ilana Braun, MD — Senior Psychiatrist, Division of Adult Psychosocial Oncology in the Department of Psychosocial Oncology and Palliative Care at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute — conducts in-depth interviews of a small cohort of patients on perceptions of lingering stigma keeping patients from discussing their cannabis use with their oncologists.
- 16 of the 24 interviewed perceived cannabis-related stigma in the clinical setting and, in some cases, decided to keep their use secret from their providers.
- Braun also launches randomized clinical trials to study the effects of CBD on situational anxiety in patients with breast cancer. Enrollment has been completed and analysis of the data has begun.
- Braun releases [an educational video](#) entitled *Medicating with Cannabis During Cancer*.

## September 2021 & 2023 | Real World Data Studies for 65+ Market Segment

- TCP commissions Brightfield Group to conduct a follow up study to the September 2021 study for AARP/Humana, surveying 2,000 Humana Medicare Advantage AARP members.
- Designed by the Medical Advisory Board and led by Dr. Ross Zafonte, study re-surveyed the 65+ segment from 2021 to show the change in views and use of cannabis-based products, finding a positive uptick in all areas:
  - One-third of those surveyed have tried CBD and 21% have tried cannabis. Among non-users there is strong eagerness to try CBD (59%) and Cannabis (56%).
  - The primary obstacles to adoption are a lack of knowledge, understanding and confidence. Educating and dispelling misconceptions about CBD and cannabis emerge as key strategies to prompt this demographic to consider medical CBD and cannabis.
  - Although satisfaction levels are somewhat high among users of both CBD and cannabis, about a third of users express uncertainty about their satisfaction. Among those neutral, many cannabis users cite factors such as cost, inconvenience in acquisition, and lack of insurance coverage.
  - Physicians remain the top trusted source with AARP holding greater trust among younger members and CBD users.

## May 2024 | TCP Founder Howard Kessler Calls for Urgent Action in National Media Blitz

- Coinciding with the federal government's move to reschedule marijuana from a Schedule I to a Schedule III drug, TCP Founder Howard Kessler launches a major national media blitz urging national leaders to seize the opportunity to transform the senior health care landscape and prioritize integrating medical cannabis into 65+ health care.
  - **Newsweek** publishes guest column by Kessler making the urgent case for changing the senior health care landscape in the wake of the federal government's announcement of its intent to reschedule marijuana, arguing: "As the 'peak 65' population unleashes a tidal wave across our healthcare systems, we need to radically rethink the senior healthcare landscape—and we need to do it fast."
    - [Easier Access to Pot May Revolutionize Health Care for Seniors](#)
  - **FOX News Channel** host Bret Baier develops a two-part series about the need to prioritize senior health in forthcoming efforts to reschedule marijuana, spotlighting the Commonwealth Project and Founder Howard Kessler's work:
    - [Through new pilot project, medical marijuana could become more accessible to senior citizens](#)
    - [Several groups say cannabis may help aging Americans manage pain](#)
  - **Washington Post** publishes feature article profiling the work of the Commonwealth Project and Kessler's efforts to establish a state-based demonstration project to study medical cannabis and the 65+ population.
    - [The Commonwealth Project pioneering medical cannabis access for seniors](#)

## July 2024 | TCP Files Public Comment with DEA & DOJ Amidst Marijuana Rescheduling

- TCP Founder Howard Kessler files a [public comment](#) with the DEA & DOJ (on behalf of TCP), urging officials to ensure that the forthcoming rule rescheduling marijuana extends explicit protections for cannabis researchers and physicians who are studying the benefits of medical cannabis, especially for the 65+ senior population.

- Kessler argues that rescheduling marijuana from Schedule I to Schedule III will provide “greater, but not complete, certainty for seniors, researchers, and physicians to engage in research or pilot health care projects that examine the benefits and distribution of medical cannabis.”

### **May 2024 | [Former General Counsel of White House ONDCP Urges Action](#)**

- Robert Kent — former General Counsel for the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy — calls for urgent action to integrate medical cannabis into 65+ health care in an op-ed in MJ Biz Daily.
- Kent highlights TCP’s efforts as promising and further argues: *“The DOJ and Drug Enforcement Administration are on the verge of ushering in one of the most historic moments in marijuana since the 1970s, but that moment will remain little more than a squandered opportunity without additional action. Now is the time to pave the way for more research on medical cannabis as an alternative to prescription drugs – to reduce the 65-and-older population’s reliance on opioids for treating pain and other medical conditions.”*
  - [For marijuana research, rescheduling would be only the beginning](#)

### **December 2024 | [TCP Participation in DEA Hearings around Marijuana Rescheduling](#)**

- TCP was invited to participate as a witness in DEA hearings focused on rescheduling marijuana from a Schedule I to a Schedule III drug, because of unparalleled expertise regarding the medical impacts of cannabis on senior populations.

### **2024 | [Continued Regulatory & Governmental Outreach](#)**

- TCP meets with high-level state and federal public officials, including senior leaders from:
  - White House Office of National Drug Control Policy
  - Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)