

Support for Legalization of Medical Cannabis among Alabama Physicians

Magdalena Szaflarski, PhD and Jerzy P. Szaflarski, MD, PhD

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The Alabama legislature is about to vote on a medical cannabis bill entitled the Compassion Act (SB 165). If passed, the law would allow patients with qualifying conditions (e.g., autism, cancer, epilepsy), as certified by a physician, to legally access and use medical cannabis through a state-run program. To be able to certify patients, physicians must be authorized to do so by the State Board of Medical Examiners and complete a medical cannabis continuing medical education course and an exam.

Thousands of studies have shown the value of cannabinoid-based treatments in cancer, epilepsy, pain, and other conditions.¹ There is also wide-spread support for cannabis legalization nationally, with around 9-in-10 Americans favoring some form of cannabis legalization.² However, health providers' attitudes and knowledge about cannabis and cannabis-based treatments have been mixed.³ It is unclear how Alabama physicians feel about legalization of medical cannabis in their state.

In collaboration with the Medical Association of the State of Alabama (MASA) and other community stakeholders, we conducted a survey of MASA members to understand the levels of support for legalization of medical cannabis among physicians in Alabama. The survey was funded by the UAB Lister Hill Center for Health Policy.

The survey used a structured online questionnaire that was fielded in February through April and took about 10 minutes to complete. The main question asked respondents about how they feel about legalization of provider-recommended use of medical cannabis in Alabama. To contrast with levels of support for medical cannabis, we also asked how they feel, in general, about legalization of recreational cannabis for adult use. Medical specialty information was also collected.

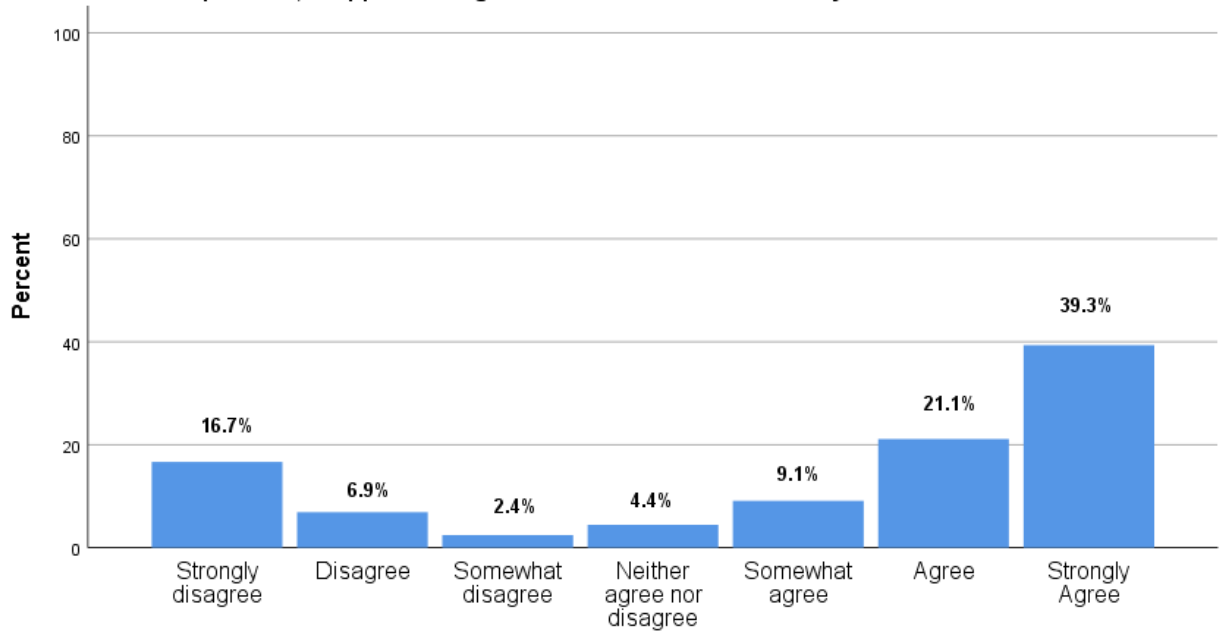
Up to date, a total of 450 of physicians of diverse medical specialties took part in the study. Preliminary results demonstrate strong support among Alabama physicians for medical cannabis legalization. As shown in Figure 1, almost 70% agreed with the statement about legalization of medical cannabis use per recommendation of a medical provider. Conversely, about 26% disagreed with the statement.

As expected, the level of support for recreational cannabis legislation among Alabama physicians is markedly lower than for medical cannabis legislation. Still, as shown in Figure 2, about 43% of the survey respondents agreed with the statement regarding legalization of recreational cannabis for adult use.

Finally, we examined views on medical cannabis legislation among Alabama pediatricians. There has been some expectation (and anecdotal evidence) that Alabama pediatricians' support for medical cannabis legislation would be lower than among all physicians because of concerns about undesirable effects of broadened cannabis access on children and youth.⁴ However, our survey results show no less support for medical cannabis legislation among pediatricians (n = 50) than among all physicians. Per Figure 3, 72% of pediatricians agreed with the statement regarding support for medical cannabis legislation.

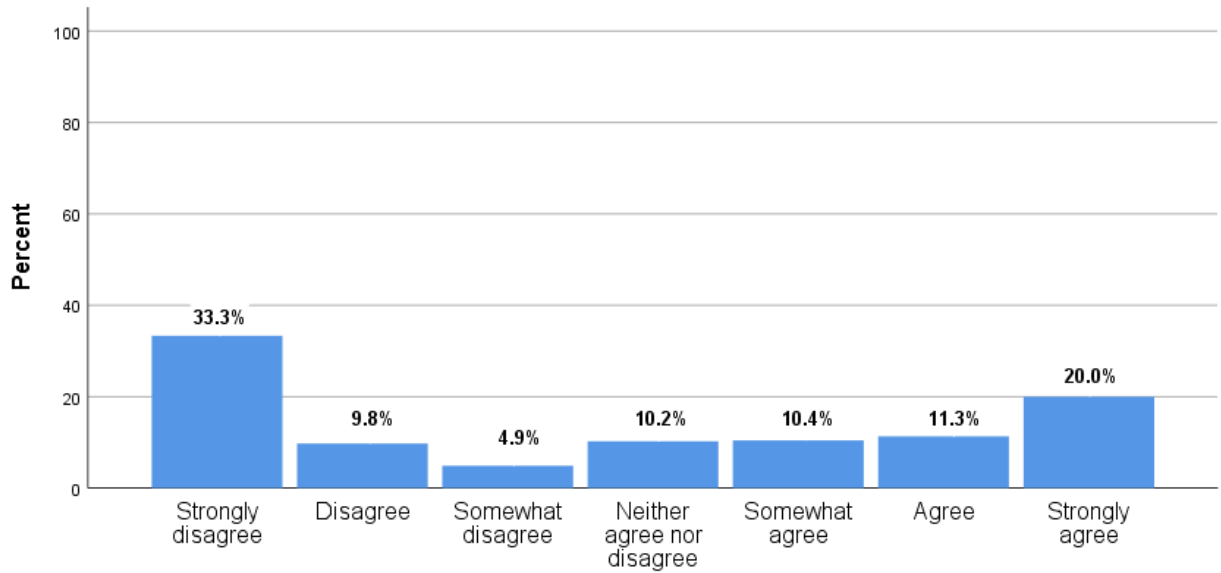
The stakeholders and legislators may use these findings to inform their strategies to shape the outcome of the Alabama medical cannabis bill.

Figure 1. Distribution of responses to the statement: "If available by recommendation of a medical provider, I support the legalization of medical cannabis by the state of Alabama"



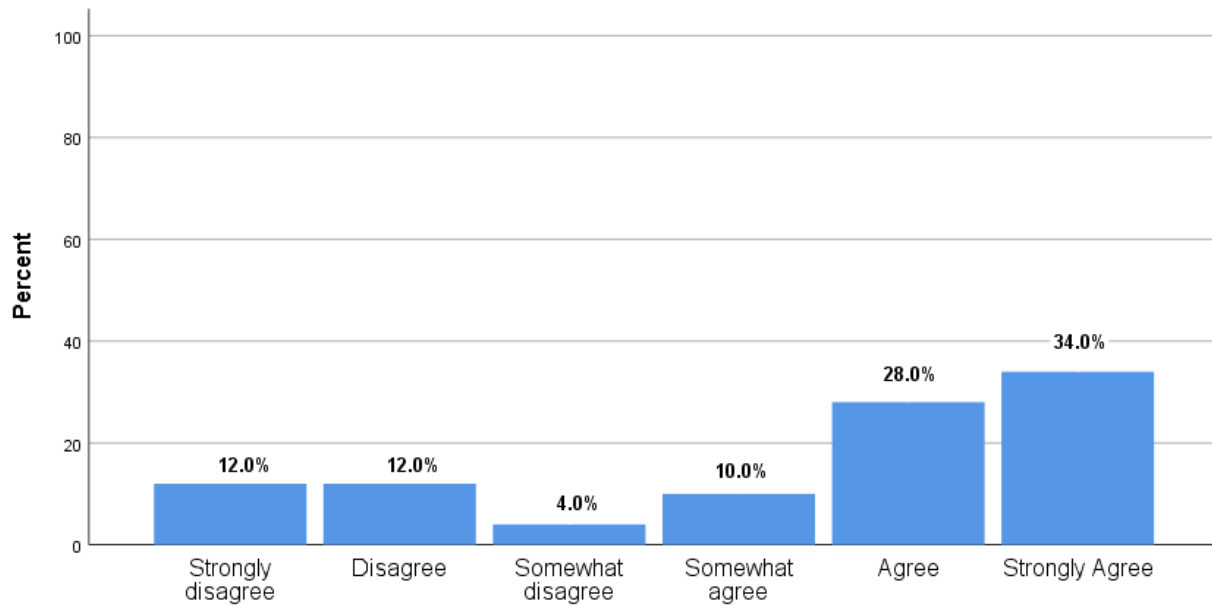
Notes: All respondents, n = 450. Respondents were asked to select the response that best characterizes how they feel about the given statement.

Figure 2. Distribution of responses to the statement: "I support the legalization of recreational cannabis for adult use"



Notes: All respondents, n = 450. Respondents were asked to select the response that best characterizes how they feel about the statement.

Figure 3. Distribution of responses to the statement: "If available by recommendation from a medical provider, I support the legalization of medical cannabis by the state of Alabama" - among pediatricians



Notes: Pediatricians only, n = 50. Respondents were asked to select the response that best characterizes how they feel about the statement.

¹National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. [The Health Effects of Cannabis and Cannabinoids: The Current State of Evidence and Recommendations for Research](#). Washington (DC): National Academies Press; 2017.

²Pew Research Center. [6 facts about Americans and marijuana](#). April 26, 2021.

³Szafarski M, McGoldrick P, Currens L, et al. [Attitudes and knowledge about cannabis and cannabis-based therapies among US neurologists, nurses, and pharmacists](#). *Epilepsy and Behavior* 2020;109:107102.

⁴Whitehill JM, Dilley JA, Brooks-Russell A, et al. [Edible cannabis exposures among children: 2017-2019](#). *Pediatrics* 2021 Mar 22;e2020019893. doi: 10.1542/peds.2020-019893. Online ahead of print.