In 1996, California was the first state to pass a Compassionate Use Act which allowed for the legal use of cannabis for medicinal or medical purposes. In 2013, voters in Los Angeles city passed Proposition D which limits the number of dispensaries and 135 and enacts taxing, density and location requirements.

Little systematic research has been conducted on how the opening and closing of these dispensaries change the ecological landscape of the neighborhoods in which they are located. This study built a longitudinal database to assess where these dispensaries are located and how those locations have changed over time.
Methods. Locations of dispensaries were obtained from official city lists and other on-line sources (e.g., LA Weekly) for 2007 and 2010. In 2012 and 2014, we combined data from those sources as well as six different websites (e.g., Weedmaps.com) and visited all the locations listed to determine whether a dispensary was currently open and operating as a dispensary. If in the course of these visits, we noticed additional venues appearing to be dispensaries, we added them to the master list.

Findings.

⇒ In 2007, Los Angeles city had 187 open and operating dispensaries.
⇒ In 2010, that number ranged between 550 and 650, depending on the data source.
⇒ In 2012, our researchers found 476 dispensaries that were currently open and operating.
⇒ In 2014, we found 418 open dispensaries.

Implications. Despite a current ordinance in Los Angeles city limiting the number of medical marijuana dispensaries, the city currently has over three times that limit as of 2014. The distribution of those dispensaries has moved from the San Fernando Valley and East L.A. to the South L.A. and San Pedro areas.