



# CANNABIS CONVERSATIONS

An exploration of cannabis and hemp topics from multiple perspectives: medical, historical, social equity, ecological and more.

## Featuring:

**Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity:**  
People change - records should too!

**How and why it's important to talk about mental health**

**Is a medical cannabis card right for you?**

Brought to you by:

Green Thumb | Nature's Grace and Wellness | Dr. Mauricio Consalter

# Spark<sup>o</sup>

## THE CONVERSATION ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

### How and why it's important to talk about mental health

It's undeniable, mental health is a key part of our overall health and wellness. According to mental health.gov, one in five American adults experience a mental health issue. Mental health is a result of our environment and our biology and as such, our emotional health is a result of our life experiences both good and bad. The combination of these factors as well as family history and brain chemistry can contribute to the existence of underlying and unaddressed mental health problems in many individuals.

#### MENTAL HEALTH



So what can we do today to help improve our mental health wellness? Well, one sustainable and accessible treatment starts by simply talking about it! According to Banyan Mental Health, talking about feelings and emotions can make us feel less alone and can help relieve stress just by speaking it out loud. Although many of us are not used to talking about these things, learning to have proactive conversations about mental health could make a huge impact in someone's life. And according to The National Alliance on Mental Illness, seeking help through support systems for our physical and mental well-being helps us address and prevent crisis situations.

So how do we Spark the Conversation about mental health? Let's check in with Alia Reichert from the Spark initiative who guides us through some common ways to talk to others about mental health.

**Q: How can we start this complicated and personal conversation for ourselves?**

**Alia Reichert:** Talking about feelings and thoughts can be scary. Start by writing them down in a journal, record what you want to say on your

phone, or even talk in front of a mirror for practice.

**Q: How should we have this conversation with someone else?**

**AR:** There will never be a perfect time and that's OK. Start by stating a fact that you've noticed about your friend or family member. For example, "I've noticed you haven't been playing your music lately, how are you? You don't seem like yourself."

**Q: If I talk about mental health or dark thoughts, will it cause that person to act out or harm themselves?**

**AR:** No, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, asking someone directly if they are planning on harming themselves can help to identify if they are at risk for a serious mental health crisis such as suicide.

**Q: What is the most important thing to remember when talking to others about their mental health?**

**AR:** The most important things are the ability to listen, to not interrupt, to not diagnose (unless you are a medical professional), and to not judge the person or the feelings being shared.

**Q: What if I've talked and still feel like harming myself, or my loved ones are threatening self-harm after talking?**

**AR:** If you feel friends, family members, or yourself are a risk, immediate action should be taken by dialing 911 and requesting a crisis intervention officer or mobile crisis team. In non-immediate situations, you can text, call, or chat the National Suicide Hotline at their updated three-digit dialing code 988.

Talking about our personal thoughts and feelings is hard. The fear of being judged or labeled is real. These stigmas prevent us from speaking our truths and keep us silent. It is imperative that we rewrite the narrative and allow ourselves the ability to discuss our feelings and emotions without fear. We all have thoughts that can get us down, but the more we share with others, the more we realize we are not alone. Be well, be open to listen, be supportive, and Spark the Conversation.

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### Is a medical cannabis card right for you?

Dr. Consalter is an Illinois MD based in Chicago who specializes in integrative treatments such as cannabis-based internal medicine for patients who struggle with severe chronic pain and mental health conditions. He's seen the first hand beneficial effects medicinal cannabis has had on his patients and believes it will continue to provide great hope as effective treatment in the future of medicine.

Cannabis works to reduce pain and health conditions by binding to the cannabinoid receptors in your body. Everyone has an endocannabinoid system and it plays a crucial part in regulating various cardiovascular, nervous, and immune system functions inside cells. When using medicinal cannabis, these functions are rebalanced. Medical cannabis is used to ease debilitating pain, insomnia, cancer symptoms, neuropathic pain, and more.

The list of qualifying conditions to become a medical cannabis patient can be found on the IDPH website, but the most common conditions are chronic pain, migraines, PTSD, cancer, Crohn's disease, and fibromyalgia. If you currently use recreational cannabis for treatment to help with conditions that qualify for a medical card, you may benefit from becoming a medical cannabis patient! Illinois medical cannabis patients

avoid the 30 percent tax on recreational cannabis sales, get access to special products, and are first priority in the dispensary.

To get your Illinois medical cannabis card, visit [drconsalter.com](http://drconsalter.com) and schedule your cannabis consultation. During your appointment with Dr. Consalter, you will review your medical history and Dr. Consalter will evaluate if you are eligible to apply for the Illinois Medical Cannabis Patient Program. If you qualify, you will receive a patient certification that will allow you to go forward with Illinois's application to become a medical cannabis patient. Once you complete the second half of your application through the state of Illinois, your card will be ready to use immediately after approval.

Obtaining your required patient certification through Dr. Consalter is beneficial for a number of reasons! Dr. Consalter has been specializing in patient cannabis certifications since the patient program began in 2015. His team is thoroughly trained to assist patients with any questions regarding cannabis education, and they can troubleshoot any issues with the application process. To schedule your cannabis consultation, visit [drconsalter.com](http://drconsalter.com) or call our office at 773-227-2687. Dr. Consalter is offering telemed appointments due to COVID safety precautions until further notice.

*This sponsored content is paid for by NeuroMedici Healthcare by Dr. Consalter. Since 1999, Dr. Consalter has always been dedicated to providing compassionate, personalized, one-on-one medical care to each and every one of his patients.*

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# GROWING FOR GOOD with Green Thumb

**Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity: “People change—criminal records should too.”**

Featuring Andrea Lindsay, lead investigator and mitigation specialist at PLSE

**Q: What is the difference between someone getting their record expunged and being pardoned? In Illinois I know of organizations providing pro bono expungement support but don't hear about support for pardons. I'm not aware of social equity organizations doing large-scale pardon work. Are there roadblocks that make the pardon process more complicated?**

**Andrea Lindsay:** Expungements are a legal proceeding and can only erase crimes that you were not convicted of: not guilty verdicts, dismissals, withdrawals, and things like that. If you have convictions, for the most part, a pardon is a necessary step to getting your record erased. In general, a pardon is a type of executive clemency, a formal recognition from the governor that you have been forgiven for the crime.

When PLSE started out more than a decade ago, we only offered services for expungements, but we soon realized that—with Philadelphia being one of the most heavily incarcerated and poorest big cities in the U.S.—almost all our clients still had one or more convictions holding them back. This led to the creation of the Pardon Project, which helps low-income Philadelphians prepare their pardon applications and provides support throughout the entire process, which can take more than two and a half years from start to finish.

While we're starting to see some success in Pennsylvania, so much of that is specific to our state's context—the laws and regulations about the process, as well as the specific people making those decisions. One major barrier is that

the process is different state by state as well as at the federal level, which makes it hard to coordinate a uniform national, or even regional, response promoting clemency. One thing that's been working well in Pennsylvania is that we're encouraging people to look at pardons as a broad community investment tool, rather than simply a matter of individual forgiveness. Pardons allow people to get better paying jobs, loans, and other opportunities for which they're otherwise already qualified, and that benefits all of us.

**Q: On a job, rental, loan, passport application, kids daycare form, and so many others, if a past “offense” is expunged, may one check the “No” box? What about if they were pardoned?**

**AL:** The first question depends on whether you have any convictions or not. In Pennsylvania, if you never pleaded guilty to nor were found guilty of any charges and you get an expungement, you're good to go. On the other hand, even if you get parts of your record expunged, you'll still have a criminal record for any convictions until you receive a pardon. A pardon in Pennsylvania allows you to expunge those convictions and check the “No” box when asked if you were ever convicted of a crime.

This, too, varies state by state. In Illinois, convictions that you've had pardoned are only eligible for an expungement (resulting in a totally clear record) if it is explicitly stated as one of the conditions, but it's still an important tool for restoring many civil rights.

**Q: PLSE recently started a Marijuana Amnesty Program. What does that landscape look like in Pennsylvania?**

**AL:** While our services are general, meaning we can help people with a wide variety of criminal record histories, we launched our targeted Marijuana Amnesty Program in October 2021 to greatly increase the number of marijuana-related cases reaching the Board of Pardons. The Board of Pardons is the first gate before reaching the governor's desk on the road to clemency in Pennsylvania, and they introduced an expedited review program for nonviolent marijuana-specific convictions in 2019. This program, which allows a qualifying case to be heard in less than a year rather than over two, is an important first step, especially in a state where recreational marijuana is still criminalized. At the same time, we also wanted to make sure that the people most targeted by the failed war on drugs are at the forefront of these initiatives because of its ongoing devastation in primarily Black and Brown neighborhoods here in Philly.

As an example, in a ten-year period ending in 2019, there were roughly 57,000 new convictions—saying nothing of the number of arrests—for marijuana-related offenses across Pennsylvania, and those numbers are still growing. Yet we also know that, until very recently, there were less than 100 people from Philadelphia with marijuana-related convictions

who had applied for a pardon in the last five years. PLSE's Marijuana Amnesty Program seeks to change that by reaching people where there is the greatest need so that pardons aren't something obtainable only to the historically advantaged, but rather a crucial component of racial and economic justice.

**Q: Is there anything our readers can do to help U.S. citizens get the right to vote while incarcerated?**

**AL:** This is such an important question! The laws vary state by state, but even in states like Pennsylvania, where incarcerated people are able to vote unless they are serving time for a felony, and where there are no other restrictions on voting even for those on probation or parole, there is a huge information and accessibility gap. So many people (1) don't know they even have the right to vote, or (2) don't know how to exercise their rights even if they know they have them, especially while incarcerated. I recommend connecting with local organizations doing this work on the ground, since they're going to be the experts on local laws and regulations to help people exercise their existing rights, and that work naturally makes connections to the national landscape and the movement to end felony disenfranchisement more generally.

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*This is a paid sponsored content article from Green Thumb Industries.*

*Andrea Lindsay, MSW, is the lead investigator and mitigation specialist at Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE). In addition to her research challenging Pennsylvania's felony murder rule and mandatory life sentences, she also directs PLSE's special projects.*

*To find out more about PLSE, visit [plsephilly.org](http://plsephilly.org).*





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