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## OCM Announces Launch of Nation Leading

## Center of Excellence for Cannabis Care and Health Equity

*Landmark Initiative will support clinicians, advance public health research, and improve patient care across New York*

*From Left to Right: Dr. Alan Boulos, Dean of Albany Medical College; Dr. Charles Argoff, Albany Medical Center Neurology and Pain Management, Senator Patricia Fahy (D-Albany); Dr. June Chin, Chief Medical Officer at OCM, John Kagia, Executive Director of OCM; Christopher Ellis, Deputy Mayor for the City of Albany*

**Albany, NY**— Today, the New York State Office of Cannabis Management announced the launch of the **Center of Excellence for Cannabis Care and Health Equity.** The center is a first-in-the-nation initiative designed to support healthcare systems and clinicians as cannabis use becomes more common across New York State.

First unveiled as part of Governor Kathy Hochul's 2026 State of the State agenda, the Center of Excellence reflects the State's health-first regulatory approach—focused on education, safety, and science-based evidence. The initiative is designed to support clinicians with clear, evidence-based educational resources and strengthen the connection between public health practices and frontline clinical care.

The initiative builds on New York State's established medical cannabis program and broader regulatory framework, recognizing that patients and clinicians are navigating cannabis use across both medical and adult-use contexts. The Center of Excellence is designed to support consistent, evidence-based understanding across this evolving landscape.

"As outlined in my State of the State, New York is committed to building a cannabis framework rooted in public health and safety," **said Governor Kathy Hochul.** "The State continues to lead in building a responsible, health-centered cannabis market, and the Center of Excellence for Cannabis Care and Health Equity represents an important step forward in ensuring that, as access expands, our healthcare system is equipped with the education, data, and tools needed to support patients and communities responsibly."

"This first-in-the-nation Center of Excellence establishes New York State as a leader in the medical cannabis industry and cutting-edge scientific research," **said Senator Patricia Fahy (D--Albany)**. "At a time when this federal government is slashing funding for innovative and research-based initiatives, New York continues to follow the science and connect patients and providers alike with the resources and support they need to navigate medical cannabis and its benefits. I applaud Governor Hochul and my legislative colleagues for once again leading the nation and putting New York patients first."

**Deputy Mayor for the City of Albany Christopher Ellis said,** "It is crucial we arm our clinicians with fact-based information and support as they navigate how to provide their patients with the best care. Through the creation of the Center of Excellence, Governor Hochul and the Office of Cannabis Management are paving the way for people to make informed decisions and demonstrating the importance of culturally responsive healthcare in creating the best patient outcomes."

"The Center of Excellence reflects OCM's commitment to creating a framework grounded in public health, safety, and equity," **said John Kagia, Executive Director of the Office of Cannabis Management.** "Under the leadership of Governor Hochul, we are now able to support clinician education and strengthen patient-provider communication while further expanding equitable access to the comprehensive care patients deserve."

"Legalization was not the finish line—it was the starting point for building a public health framework," **said Dr. June Chin, Chief Medical Officer at OCM.** "The Center of Excellence is about providing clinicians with access to consistent, evidence-based information so they can navigate these conversations with clarity and confidence. At its core, this work is about health equity and ensuring that all communities have access to informed, safe, and culturally responsive care as this landscape continues to evolve."

OCM is launching the Center of Excellence in collaboration with leading medical institutions statewide, including:

- SUNY Upstate Medical University
- Stony Brook Medicine
- University of Rochester Medical Center
- New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine
- Albany Medical Center
- CUNY School of Public Health
- University at Albany College of Integrated Health Sciences
- New York State Office of Mental Health

These institutions will participate in a structured pilot program to evaluate educational approaches, strengthen clinician engagement, and develop programs for broader statewide implementation. Together, they represent diverse regions and patient populations, ensuring the program reflects the needs of communities across New York State.

The pilot program features Grand Rounds and clinical webinars based on real-world patient scenarios, alongside educational toolkits for pediatric, OB-GYN, primary care, pain and palliative care, and emergency care settings. These resources highlight culturally competent, patient-centered communication and are designed for integration into medical education and residency training.

The initiative aligns with existing clinical standards and supports clinicians in navigating cannabis-related discussions within their current scope of practice. OCM will also implement follow-up surveys to assess clinicians' knowledge, confidence, and use of educational resources over time.

Recognizing that cannabis exists at the intersection of clinical care, prevention, and population health, the pilot is designed to prepare a workforce that can navigate all these dimensions—not just in the exam room. By engaging schools of public health and graduate training programs alongside clinical education, and by offering dedicated internship opportunities for public health students, the initiative bridges individual patient care with broader population health outcomes.

The Center of Excellence is being developed in consultation with the New York State Department of Health (DOH) and the New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) and is designed to align with existing public health guidance and statewide prevention efforts.

The Center of Excellence is a vital initiative that ensures clinicians and allied health professionals are equipped with the education and data-driven insights into cannabis use they need to provide guidance, promote safety, and foster informed conversations with patients," **said Dr. James McDonald, New York State Health Commissioner.** "Under the leadership of Governor Hochul and through our valuable partnership with the Office of Cannabis Management, we look forward to supporting New York's healthcare providers with the tools they need to deliver evidence-informed, patient-centered, equitable healthcare following the legalization of adult-use cannabis."

To support the Center of Excellence for Cannabis Care and Health Equity, the Office of Cannabis Management has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to develop a series of additional clinician training courses. OCM is seeking vendors to design and deliver high-quality, online, asynchronous training focused on the endocannabinoid system, medical cannabis, cannabis science, consumer health, and health equity. The training will be accessible to a broad audience, including medical providers and pharmacists, providing consistent, research-informed education across both clinical and community settings.

**Alan Boulos, M.D., Dean of Albany Medical College and Executive Vice President of the Albany Med Health System, said**, "As the region's only academic health system, the Albany Med Health System's mission is to be the first choice for patient experience, quality, and clinical excellence by delivering accessible, collaborative, and trusted care, advancing discovery, and educating the next generation of healthcare professionals. Naturally, it is our obligation to train competent, compassionate clinicians who are equipped to safely and effectively navigate evolving therapies and address barriers to care. We thank the New York State Office of

Cannabis Management for inviting us to work with them on this important effort to help foster shared, informed decision-making between patients and providers."

**Dr. Peter Igarashi, Knapp Endowed Dean of the Renaissance School of Medicine, said**, "We appreciate the opportunity to host the Office of Cannabis Management on this important initiative. As cannabis use continues to evolve, it is essential that clinicians have access to evidence-based education and resources to help guide patient care. We look forward to welcoming OCM to Stony Brook's Renaissance School of Medicine this fall to participate in our Psychiatry and Behavioral Health Grand Rounds and continue conversations that help clinicians understand emerging research, identify best practices, and address the needs of patients."

**Dr. Tolani Ajagbe, division chief of Addiction Psychiatry and program director of the Addiction Psychiatry Fellowship at SUNY Upstate Medical University said**, "As cannabis policy continues to evolve across the nation, and especially in New York State, healthcare professionals must have access to trusted, evidence-based guidance to support high-quality patient care. Upstate Medical University is honored to partner with New York State on this innovative Center of Excellence. Consistent with our mission of advancing health through education, research, and patient care, this collaboration will help equip clinicians with the knowledge and resources needed to provide safe, informed, and equitable care for communities across New York."

**Deborah Levine, Cannabis Education Advisory Panel member and Director of the Harlem Health Initiative at the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health & Health Policy**, said, "I applaud Governor Hochul and the New York State Office of Cannabis Management for launching this groundbreaking Center of Excellence for Cannabis Care and Health Equity. As cannabis policy, healthcare, and consumer access continue to evolve, patients, clinicians, and communities need trusted, evidence-based information to make informed decisions. The Center of Excellence represents a major investment in public health and a critical step toward strengthening patient-provider communication, advancing health literacy, and ensuring healthcare professionals have access to the latest science, clinical guidance, and educational resources."

"Equally important, this initiative helps address longstanding health inequities by expanding access to accurate information and culturally responsive care for communities that have historically been underserved and disproportionately impacted by cannabis-related policies. New York is once again demonstrating national leadership by building a cannabis framework rooted in science, education, equity, and public health."

**Tomoko Udo, Associate Dean for Research in UAlbany's College of Integrated Health Sciences**, said, **"**Promoting safe cannabis use among New York adults requires a workforce equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge to screen for use, engage in culturally competent conversations, and provide evidence-based care to those in need. UAlbany's College of Integrated Health Sciences is committed to thoughtful, data-informed public health policy and proud to help New York be a leader on this important issue."

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The New York State Office of Cannabis Management (OCM) oversees the State's Medical Cannabis Program, ensuring patients have safe, reliable access to high-quality medical cannabis products. OCM supports patients, caregivers, and practitioners through clinical guidance, and education, rooted in scientific research and patient experience.

The Office remains committed to ensuring medical cannabis continues to serve as a compassionate, patient-centered component of New York's healthcare landscape.

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