colorado school of public health

Colorado Cannabis Education, Research, and Policy Project
Scientific Review Council

MEETING SUMMARY

Location: On Zoom | **Date:** Thursday, September 3, 2026 | **Time:** 10:00 – 11:30 AM

Attendees: Daphna Rubin, Cathy Bradley, Christopher Urbina, Annie Collier, Ashley Brooks-Russell, Diane Straub, Erica Wymore, Greg Kinney, Gregory Tung, James Corbett, Joseph Schacht, Kennon Heard, Kent Hutchison, Louis Leslie, Susan Calcaterra, Travis Leiker, Valerie Yim, Zachary Giano, Elise Plakke, Elizabeth Sexton, Morgan Chen, Leslie Brooks

Welcome and Introductions: The meeting was called to order and all Scientific Review Council (SRC) members, project staff, and community participants introduced themselves. The agenda was reviewed and no conflicts of interest were disclosed.

Legislative and Funding Updates: An update about the latest policy and funding implications on the project were reviewed. The project received an additional $2 million from the State of Colorado to support research and the public education campaign. The team is monitoring the 2026 election and anticipated changes to the Colorado legislature and governor's administration—beginning in January 2027. Educating new policymakers about the project and advocating for continued funding are priorities will be a priority. Current statutory restrictions may limit the School of Public Health's ability to accept additional federal, philanthropic, or other external funding. Project leadership will explore potential legislative changes to increase flexibility for partnerships, funding, and dissemination.

Scientific Research Team Update: The latest search identified more than 91,000 records, with 679 studies included. The team is transitioning to a living-review model to support continuous evidence updates. Interest from other states and health departments is increasing, particularly in the project's methods, evidence map, publications, and potential collaborations. The team identified a need to make public-facing research webpages more user-friendly and visually accessible. The review of high-concentration cannabis and older adults is nearing completion. The team is also developing other accessible formats. SRC input will help identify priority findings, themes, and stories.

Education, Community Engagement, and Evaluation: The term "toolkits" is being replaced with "content guidance documents" to clarify that these are internal resources for translating science into public education materials. Existing guidance addresses cannabis basics, youth, pregnancy/parenting, and coping; LGBTQ+ guidance is also in development. The school's external relations and rural public health team will support rural engagement, dissemination, provider education, and review of LGBTQ+ related content. Hear/Say had strong participation in May and June 2026. Planned refinements include earlier scheduling, expanded community and university venues, new artists, possible rural expansion, and consideration of a national keynote speaker. Since June, approximately 1,300 in-person community contacts have been documented through events and presentations. Evaluation continues to track exposure, engagement, behavior change, and action/impact. Community feedback indicates a continued need for practical, meaningful coping information.

Provider Education: The project team presented a proposed continuing education program for healthcare providers. Proposed topics include cannabis products and concentration, current evidence, screening and assessment, referral and treatment resources, Colorado-specific resources, behavioral health and addiction, and specialty topics. SRC members recommended that the program, including the following:

- Include behavioral health professionals beyond physicians, particularly psychologists and social workers.
- Be offered online in manageable segments.
- Include inpatient clinicians as well as emergency and urgent care providers.
- Provide practical referral resources across communities and payer types.
- Help providers feel more comfortable asking patients about cannabis use.
- Address cannabis-related conditions, including hyperemesis and acute intoxication.
- Include brain science and substance-use behavior to help providers understand addiction rather than viewing these behaviors solely as noncompliance or drug-seeking.

Ashley Brooks-Russell and the education team will incorporate SRC feedback and return with an updated education strategy.

Publications and Research Dissemination: Three new publications were reported since the previous meeting: (1) Hear/Say evaluation: Arts-based engagement increased knowledge, empowered artists and trusted community ambassadors, and created opportunities for inclusive dialogue; (2) Pregnancy and parenting study: Pregnant individuals and parents of children under age two showed lower cannabis-related knowledge and less confidence in reducing risk than parents of older children; and (3) Policy review: The review identified important developments and gaps in current cannabis policy. Additional manuscripts are under review or in development on cannabis-use demographics, social media influencers and behavior change, campaign implementation, older adults, cannabis policy, and updates to the scoping review. Several findings are expected to be presented at the APHA Annual Meeting in November in Texas.

Initium Health / Tea on THC Campaign: Campaign performance remains strong, with approximately 77 million lifetime impressions/reach, more than 600,000 website visitors, approximately 40,000 monthly visitors, and more than 1 million interactions during the past year. Strategy is shifting from broad reach toward engagement, credible science, and directing audiences to useful information. The campaign continues across Snapchat, Twitch, Reddit, Instagram, Facebook, Amazon, TikTok, and Google, with messaging adapted by audience. National traffic is increasing; the team is working to strengthen suburban and rural Colorado outreach. Influencer partnerships remain a focus, and research and evaluation are being developed to assess their effectiveness.

Campaign Priorities and Upcoming Content: Plans include expanding the video library and diversifying creative content with seasonal and rural imagery, strengthening behavioral-change metrics and the influencer strategy, expanding the arts exhibition, and pursuing public health-focused awards and recognition. The campaign will also increase its use of compelling personal and community impact stories. New short-form videos are in development on age of initiation, the effects of THC on the brain, THC concentration, communicating with youth, high-concentration cannabis, pregnancy and prenatal exposure, and impaired driving. A campaign photo shoot is planned for October. To date, the campaign has received approximately 13 awards, including five finalist recognitions and one honorable mention.

SRC Discussion and Key Takeaways: SRC members identified an opportunity to more intentionally connect scientific experts with youth and influencers to translate research findings into language that resonates with younger audiences. The campaign team continues to engage youth through focus groups in both rural communities and Denver, with some of the strongest messaging emerging directly from community members. The team also discussed strengthening connections among focus groups, influencers, and the SRC, with Christopher Urbina noting that the SRC could potentially help facilitate these efforts. Over the coming year, the project will continue developing compelling personal and community impact stories. The initiative is increasingly viewed as a model for translating public-health research into meaningful community engagement and is attracting national interest in its research, campaign model, funding, and potential for broader implementation.

Next Meeting and Adjournment: The next SRC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, November 5, 2026. The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:23 a.m.