



New Jersey Cannabis Regulatory Commission

Report on the 2019 Medicinal Marijuana Program

**Summarizing Efforts by the Division of Medicinal
Marijuana, Department of Health**

Adopted May 8, 2024



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Introduction

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 24:6I-24, the New Jersey Cannabis Regulatory Commission assumed all powers, duties, and responsibilities with regard to the regulation and oversight of medicinal cannabis activities from the New Jersey Department of Health (Department). This report summarizes the efforts of the Department of Health's medicinal marijuana program in the calendar year 2019.

In 2019, the Department of Health, Division of Medicinal Marijuana continued reform efforts focused on expanding access to medicinal marijuana. Participation in New Jersey's Medical Marijuana Program (MMP) grew in 2019, adding 37,554 new patients. New patient enrollment increased 38% over 2018 when 27,308 new patients were enrolled. This brought the total number of patients registered since the program's inception to 89,363. Active program enrollment at the end of 2019 was 65,475.

The program also increased the number of active caregivers by 895, an increase of 56% over 2018, bringing the number of active caregivers to 2,482. The program also added 303 new physicians in 2019, with a total number of physicians actively writing recommendations rising to 1,085.

The new conditions added in 2018 continued to fuel the most growth in enrollment, with chronic pain related to musculoskeletal disorders and anxiety accounting for a majority of total patient enrollment. In total, the program served patients with 18 different debilitating conditions, including more than 19,000 patients suffering from chronic pain related to musculoskeletal disorders.

2019 also brought key policy changes to the Medicinal Marijuana Program. The Department of Health adopted new rules in May 2019, and the Jake Honig Compassionate Use Medical Cannabis Act (P.L. 2019, c. 153) was signed into law by Governor Murphy on July 2, 2019.

Importantly, the medicinal 2019 also continued to feature an expansion of the medicinal marijuana industry, with the first new Alternative Treatment Center (ATC) opening from the 2018 Request for Applications and a satellite dispensary location for an existing ATC. Due to continued program expansion, the Department issued another Request for Applications for Alternative Treatment Centers on July 1, 2019.

This report details the statistics and major developments in the program for the calendar year 2019 and provides details on the Division of Medicinal Marijuana's budget and regulatory process.

Jake Honig Compassionate Use Medical Cannabis Act

On July 2, 2019 [Governor Murphy signed the Jake Honig Compassionate Use Medical Cannabis Act into law \(P.L. 2019, c. 153\)](#). The transformative legislation included most of the Department’s 2018 recommendations for statutory reforms as well as a host of other provisions meant to improve medicinal marijuana access in New Jersey.

The law is named for Jake Honig, a 7-year-old who was diagnosed with brain cancer early in life and passed away in early 2018. For Jake, as with many patients with debilitating illnesses, medicinal marijuana offered relief from pain and other symptoms. However, his treatment was impacted by laws that imposed monthly limits on marijuana purchases for patients and other barriers. Jake and his family were key advocates and motivators for reforming the program and the law therefore carries his name.

On July 2, 2019, immediately following the signing of the new law, the Department of Health issued guidance to all alternative treatment centers that there were no longer medicinal marijuana purchase limits for terminal patients.

The law featured many important patient-focused reforms, codified key pieces of the Department’s updated regulatory framework, and overhauled and expanded the legal underpinning for the medicinal marijuana industry in New Jersey. Critically, the law created the Cannabis Regulatory Commission, which was later constituted in 2021 and took over the regulation of medicinal cannabis (language change from “marijuana” denoted by law) from the Department of Health.

Patient-focused reforms in the law included:

- eliminating purchase limits for terminal patients and raising the monthly purchase limits for all other patients from 2 ounces to 3 ounces;
- extending the maximum authorization period for patients from three months to one year, reducing the number of mandatory physician visits and, in turn, financial burdens for patients;
- expanding the eligibility for participating health care practitioners to include physician assistants and nurse practitioners;
- expanding the availability of edible products to all patients;
- phasing out and eliminating the sales tax on medicinal cannabis purchases;
- enshrining employment protections and other key legal protections for medicinal cannabis patients into statute; and
- expanding the use of caregivers by allowing two per patient, and eliminating the background check requirement for family members serving as caregivers.

Cannabis-industry focused reforms included:

- codification of different types of alternative treatment centers: cultivators, manufacturers and dispensaries;
- elimination of the requirement that ATCs operate as non-profit organizations and provision of a legal mechanism for existing non-profit ATCs to convert to for-profit entities;
- authorization for ATCs to provide home delivery to patients and caregivers;
- establishment of the clinical registrant permit type which, when authorized by the Commission, would incentivize medicinal cannabis research; and
- updated requirements for ATC permit applications and the establishment of the framework for a new permitting process under the Cannabis Regulatory Commission.

Upon signing of the new law, the Department immediately began implementing the new statute and immediate changes were put into place in the patient registry to accommodate the statutory amendments.

Regulatory Process

In June of 2018, following the issuance of the Executive Order #6 report, the Department proposed regulatory amendments, rule repeals and new rules to N.J.A.C. 8:64 to enact the regulatory changes included in the report.

Those [regulations](#) were adopted in May 2019.

The regulatory changes included in the new rules were:

- addition of new qualifying conditions for treatment with medicinal cannabis as authorized in 2018;
- enactment of permit endorsements for cultivation, manufacturing and dispensing which enable businesses to specialize in one or more parts of the supply chain;
- codification of the expansion of fee reduction and reduced fee eligibility for patients;
- amendments to the process for adding new medical conditions, allowing the Commissioner of Health and the successor agency, the Cannabis Regulatory Commission, to add new medical conditions without first petitioning the review panel; and
- amendments to the Department's ATC permitting process to add an assessment of plans to involve women, minorities and veterans in ATC ownership and management.

Education

To recruit new physicians and promote the MMP, the Commissioner of Health, Dr. Shereef Elnahal, embarked on a series of grand rounds at academic medical centers throughout New Jersey in 2018. The grand rounds included a review of the scientific literature pertaining to medicinal marijuana, evidence-based advice on dosing for patients, an overview of the Medicinal Marijuana Program, and instructions on how to participate and enroll patients. The grand rounds reached hundreds of health care practitioners and contributed to a significant increase in enrollment. The grand rounds continued in 2019 with three more lectures.

Vaping Crisis

On August 16, 2019, the Department of Health issued a statewide health alert to health care providers and local health departments following reports of a severe lung disease in people who had used vaping products. Because vape products were available in New Jersey’s Medical Marijuana Program and because some of the reports seemed potentially linked to marijuana vapes, the Division of Medicinal Marijuana assisted with the Department’s investigation into what was ultimately termed “e-cigarette or vaping use-associated lung injury” (EVALI).

The Department’s investigation revealed that no reported cases of EVALI in New Jersey were ultimately linked to legal medicinal marijuana products.

Medicinal Marijuana Review Panel

The table below lists the confirmed Medicinal Marijuana Review Panel members, their specialty area, and requirements as per the MMP Rules and Regulations.

Table 1: Medicinal Marijuana Review Panel

Panel Member	Specialty	Rule Requirement
Vacant	President, New Jersey State Board of Medical Examiners	President, New Jersey State Board of Medical Examiners
Alex Bekker, MD, PhD Chairperson	Anesthesiology	Pain & symptom management expertise/physician
Petros Levounis, MD, MA	Psychiatry Addiction Medicine	Pain & symptom management expertise/physician
Cheryl Kennedy, MD Vice Chairperson	Psychiatrist Addiction Medicine	Pain & symptom management expertise/physician
Jessica Ann Scerbo, MD	Pediatric, Hematology & Oncology	Physician

Panel Member	Specialty	Rule Requirement
Mary L. Johansen, PhD	Nursing	Non-physician
Mary M. Bridgeman, Pharm D.	Pharmacist	Non-physician
Stephanie Zarus, Pharm D.	Pain Management	Non-physician

Enrollment Process

Patient Registry Updates

In 2019, the primary updates to the patient registry were to implement the changes included in the rule adoption for N.J.A.C. 8:64 (see above) and the statutory amendments contained in Jake Honig’s Law (P.L. 2019, c.153).

Enrollment Increases

Patient enrollment continued to accelerate throughout 2019, with 37,554 patient enrollments occurring in the calendar year. In October of that year, the Department saw more than 4,000 enrollments in a month for the first time since the program’s inception.

Table 2: Patient Enrollment By Month

Month	Patient Enrollments
January	2,219
February	2,424
March	2,663
April	2,874
May	2,675
June	2,687
July	3,141
August	3,565
September	3,416
October	4,230
November	3,663
December	3,997
Total	37,554

Budget

In State Fiscal Year 2019, the Division of Medicinal Marijuana received an appropriation of \$857,000 and \$2,861,015 in revenues from permitting and registration fees. The Division of Medicinal Marijuana expended \$3,591,704.38.

Alternative Treatment Centers

2018 Request for Applications

Because of the unprecedented expansion of the patient population, the Department of Health issued a [Request for Applications](#) for six new Alternative Treatment Centers in July 2018. Applications were due on August 31, 2018. Following completeness review by the Department and scoring by a selection committee, awards were issued for six new permits in December 2018. [Documents from the RFA](#) are available on the Commission's website.

Through 2019, the Department investigated the six awarded companies prior to permit issuance. In December 2019, the first of the awardees, GTI New Jersey began dispensing at a new dispensary in Paterson, New Jersey.

2019 Request for Applications

On July 1, 2019, the Department issued an additional [Request for Applications](#) for alternative treatment centers. Released under updated regulations, the RFA called for 15 additional dispensaries, five additional cultivators, and four additional vertically integrated ATCs (encompassing permits to cultivate, manufacture and dispense). Applications were due in August 2019 and review began in September. In November, all application reviews were halted pursuant to a court order related to lawsuits by several applicants. [Documents from the RFA](#) are available on the Commission's website.

Permit Issuances

In 2019 there were three permit issuances: GTI New Jersey received a permit to cultivate and a permit to dispense in Paterson, and Garden State Dispensary received a permit to dispense at a new satellite location in Union. Permits for all six existing ATCs were renewed in 2019.

Revocations

There were no ATC permit revocations in 2019.

Enrollment

In 2019, each ATC had the following numbers of unique patients assigned to them:

Table 3: Unique Patients by ATC

ATC	Unique Patients Assigned
Breakwater	12,562
Compassionate Care Foundation	7,076
Curaleaf/Compassionate Sciences	23,700
Greenleaf Compassion Center	5,289
Garden State Dispensary	20,410
Garden State Dispensary Union	1,233
Rise/GTI New Jersey	226
Harmony Foundation	9,636 ¹

Dispensing

In total, ATCs dispensed 244,820 ounces of medicinal marijuana to registered patients in 2019. This equates to 15,301 pounds.

¹Some patients were assigned but never visited an ATC or purchased any products.

Program Statistics (as of December 31, 2019)

Table 4: Patient Registration Data

	Total	
Active Patients	65,475	
	New in 2019	Total Since Program Inception
Patients Deceased	1,187	3,410
First Time Patient Registrations	37,554	89,363

Table 5: Caregiver Data

	Total	
Active Caregivers	2,482	
	New in 2019	Total since Program Inception
Total Caregiver Registrations	895	5,759

Table 6: Physician Registration Data

	Total	
Active Physicians	1,085	
	New in 2019	Total since Program Inception
Total Physician Activity	303	1,317

Table 7: Alternative Treatment Center Investigations

	New in 2019	Total since Program Inception
Initiated	0	12
Completed	1	7

Table 8: Alternative Treatment Center Permits

	New in 2019	Total since Program Inception
Issued	3	9
Awarded	0	12
Revoked	0	0

Table 9: Nature of Patients Qualifying Condition

Debilitating Condition	2019
Anxiety	20,128
Chronic Pain (related to musculoskeletal disorders)	19,115
Chronic Pain (of visceral origin)	2,357
Glaucoma	171
Inflammatory bowel disease	1,016
Intractable skeletal spasticity	2,150
Lateral sclerosis	50
Migraine	3,111
Multiple sclerosis	485
Muscular dystrophy	32
Opioid Use Disorder, as an adjunct to Medication Assisted Therapy	1,306
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	3,214
Seizure disorder	565
Severe or Chronic pain (related to other approved conditions)	2,474
Terminal Cancer	723
Terminal Illness (with prognosis of less than 12 months of life)	162
Tourette Syndrome	76

Figure 1: 2019 Frequency of Debilitating Conditions Horizontal Bar Chart

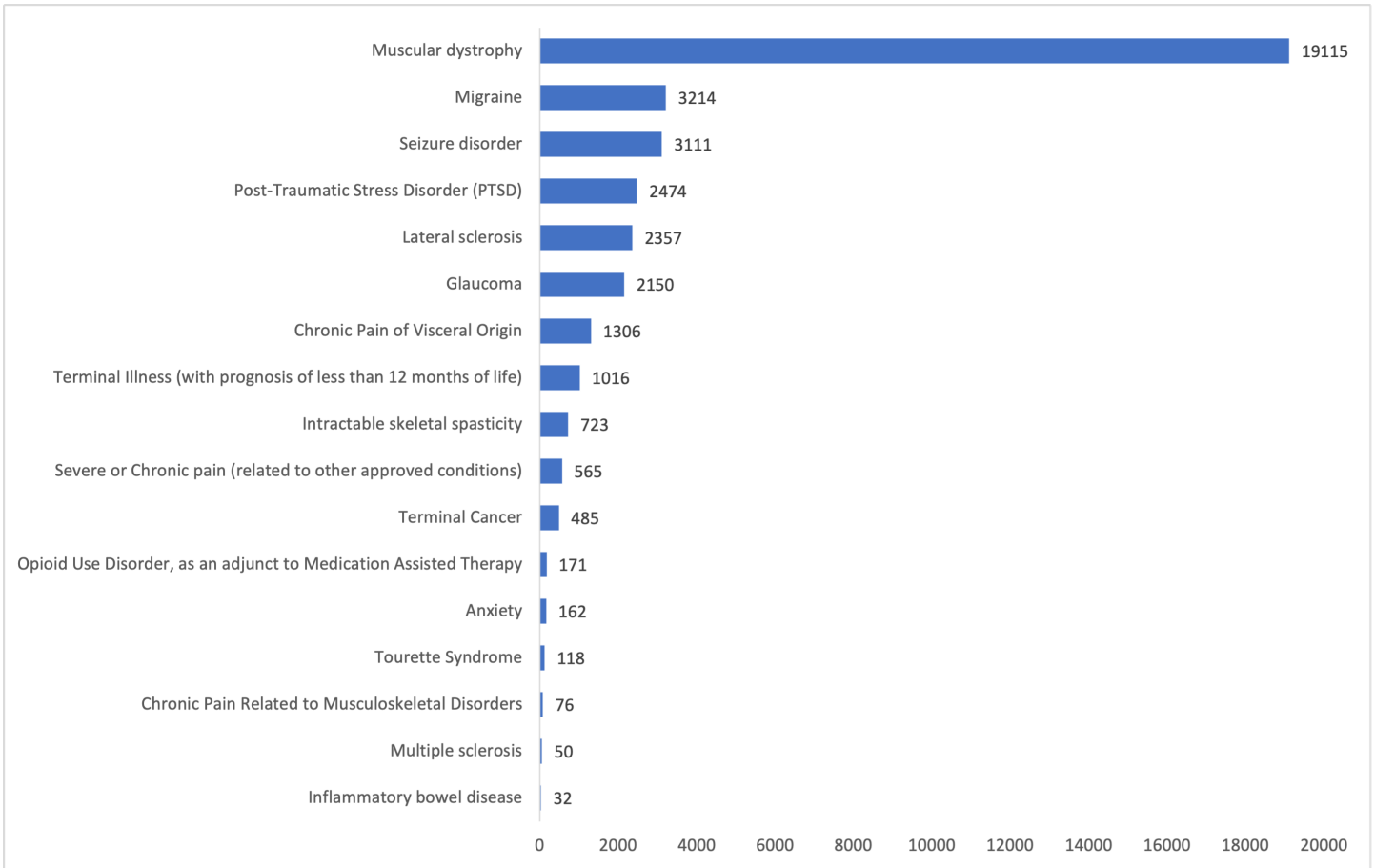


Figure 2: 2019 Physicians Enrolled in Medicinal Marijuana Program, by Specialty

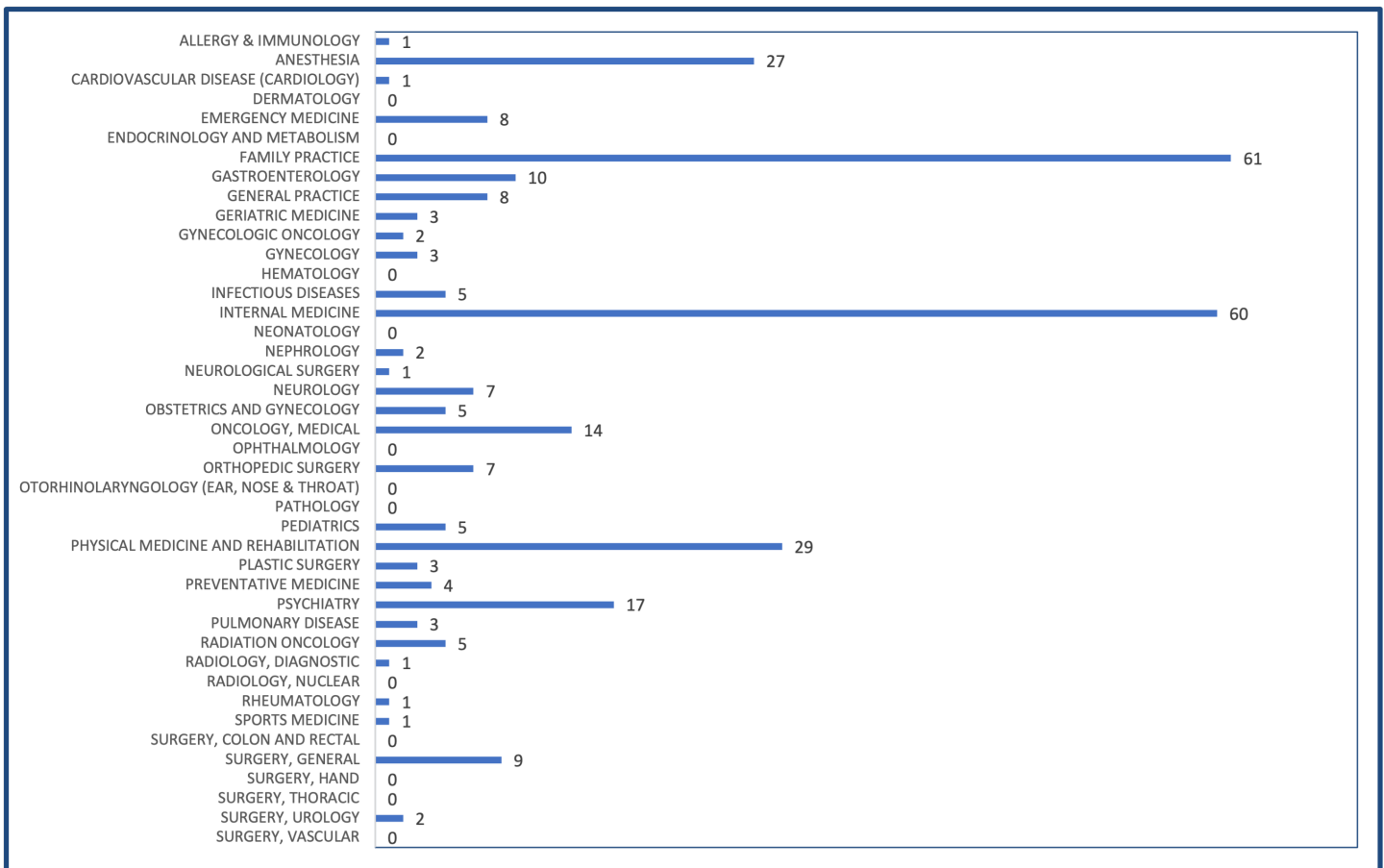
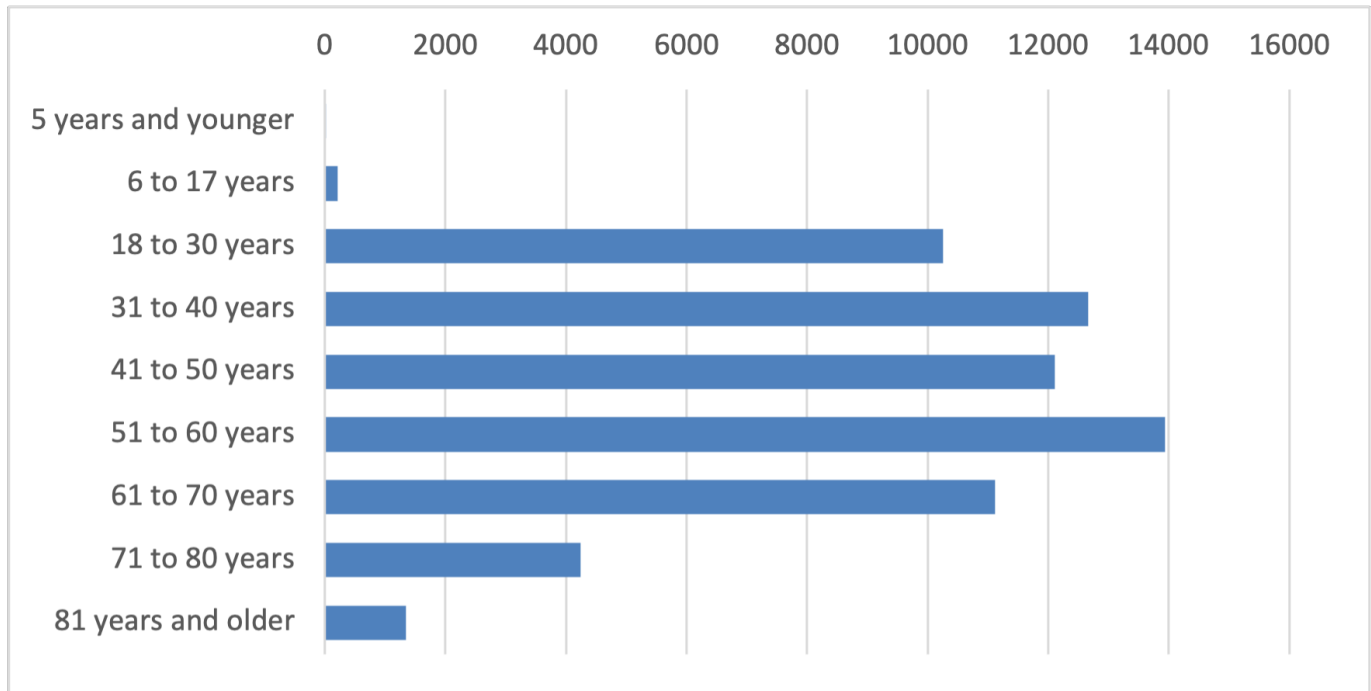


Table 10: Patients by Age Distribution

Patients by Age	Number	Percentage
5 years and younger	9	0.01%
6 to 17 years	213	0.32%
18 to 30 years	10,249	15.56%
31 to 40 years	12,659	19.21%
41 to 50 years	12,110	18.38%
51 to 60 years	13,932	21.15%
61 to 70 years	11,123	16.88%
71 to 80 years	4,237	6.43%
81 years and older	1,351	2.05% ²

Figure 3: Patients by Age Group Bar Chart



²The Age & Gender tables include Expired, Inactive and Pending Approval in addition to Active Patients. As such, the total number of patients captured in these tables may not equal the total number of active patients reported for the year.

Table 11: Patient Gender Distribution

Patients By Gender		
Male	21,022	53.77%
Female	18069	46.22%
Not reported	6	0.02%

Figure 4: Patient Gender Breakdown Pie Chart

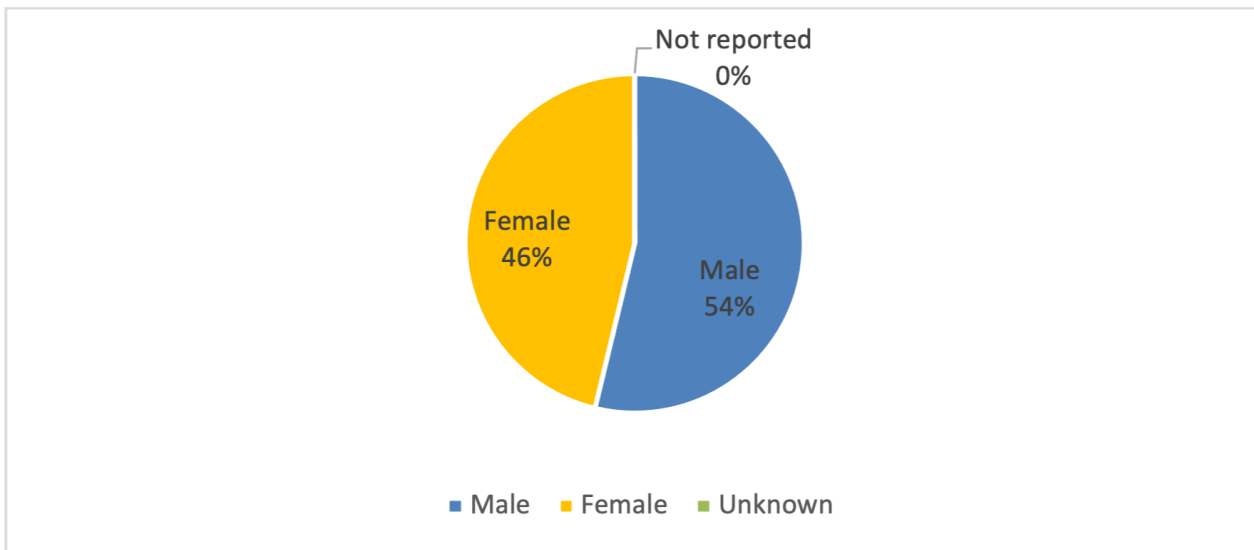


Figure 5: Active Patients by County, 2019

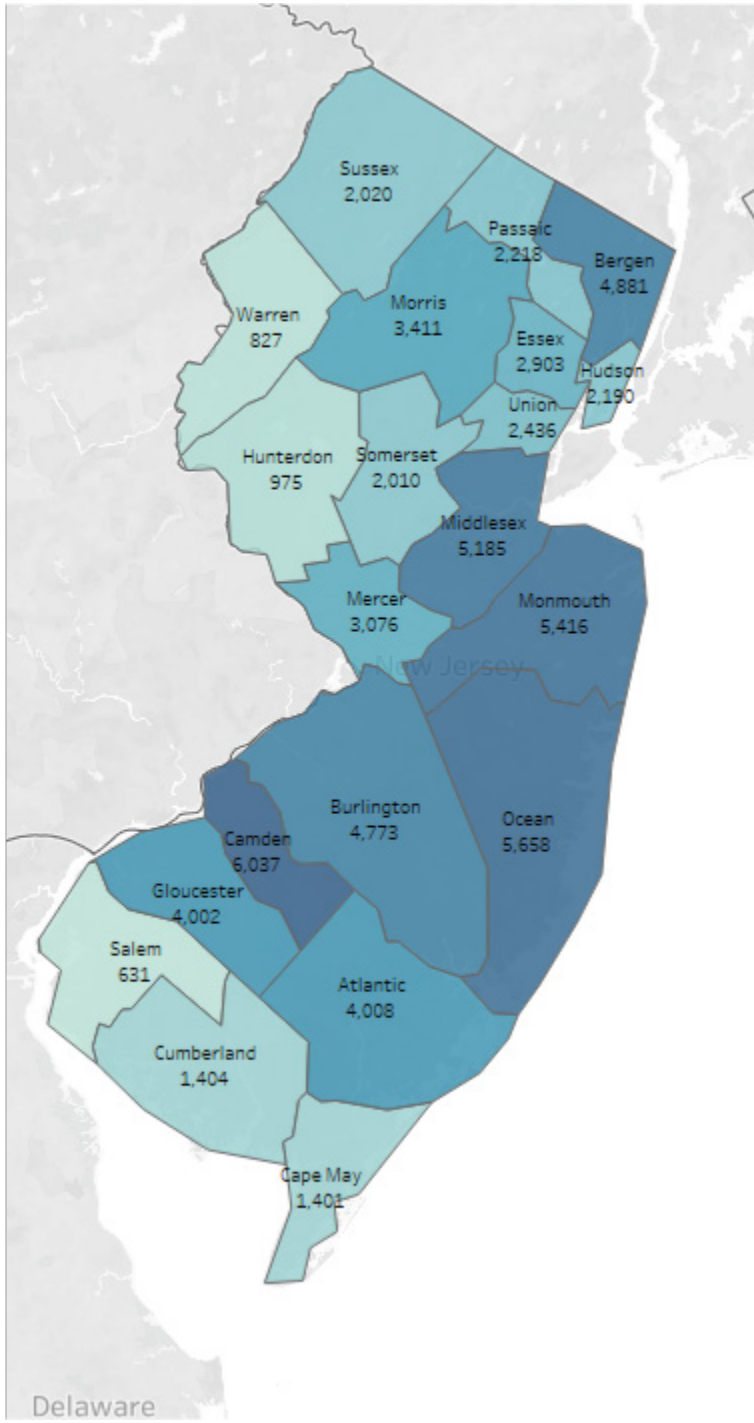


Table 12: Active Patients by County, 2019

<u>County</u>	<u>Active Patients</u>
Atlantic	4,008
Bergen	4,881
Burlington	4,773
Camden	6,037
Cape May	1,401
Cumberland	1,404
Essex	2,903
Gloucester	4,002
Hudson	2,190
Hunterdon	975
Mercer	3,076
Middlesex	5,185
Monmouth	5,416
Morris	3,411
Ocean	5,658
Passaic	2,218
Salem	631
Somerset	2,010
Sussex	2,020
Union	2,436
Warren	827
<hr/> Total	<hr/> 65,475

Figure 6: Patients by County Sorted Descending, 2019

