



THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF
BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE,
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES & HOSPITALS

ENVIRONMENTAL SCANS OF HEMP-DERIVED THC & CBD BEVERAGE RETAIL ENVIRONMENTS

AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN REPORT:

Hemp-Derived THC & CBD Beverage Observations

DATA CONDUCTED BY RHODE ISLAND PREVENTION COALITIONS FROM:

Southern Providence, Blackstone Valley, Kent County, East Bay, Newport County, And South County

PREPARED BY:

Tamar Dalcé Coles, BHDDH, ADMINISTRATOR II



THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF
BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE,
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES & HOSPITALS

Contents

ENVIRONMENTAL SCANS OF HEMP-DERIVED THC & CBD BEVERAGE RETAIL ENVIRONMENTS 1

Introduction and Acknowledgment 3

The Purpose of the Environmental Scan 4

Methodology..... 4

 The scan captured information related to: 5

 Coalition staff utilized a structured survey tool during in-person visits to document: 5

Rhode Island’s Regional Prevention System Overview 6

 Participating regions included:..... 6

Findings / Regional Breakdown..... 9

 Statewide Retail Findings 9

Behavioral Health and Safety Considerations 11

 Limitations..... 12

Key Takeaways / Statewide Prevention and Strategic Planning Implications 12

 Prevention-Informed Strategic Priorities 13

Conclusion 13



THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF
BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE,
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES & HOSPITALS

Introduction and Acknowledgment

Observational data and community insights were provided by six regional prevention coalitions that conducted scans of retail establishments where hemp-derived THC products were present and marketed within their local communities. BHDDH extends a sincere appreciation to the regional prevention coalitions that carried out these environmental scans. Through direct engagement with local retailers and community members, coalition staff gathered valuable observations that helped inform this report. Their dedication to prevention work and community health continues to play a vital role in these prevention initiatives.

The Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH) remains committed to strengthening prevention planning and improving community health outcomes across the state. Environmental scanning is an important component of this work, helping the department and its partners better understand emerging trends, community conditions, potential risks, and protective factors related to substance use. Prevention science emphasizes that effective prevention planning is strongest when it uses reliable data, community observations, and structured tools to better understand local conditions, identify risks and protective factors, and guide informed strategies. By using research to learn how environments and behaviors influence health, prevention science helps shape policies and community responses that support safer, healthier outcomes.

This report was prepared by the BHDDH Prevention Unit through analysis of coalition-collected environmental scan data. The findings provide a snapshot of environmental factors that influence substance use patterns and inform prevention efforts. By synthesizing these observations, the department aims to support data-driven planning and guide prevention strategies that reflect both community needs and best practices in prevention science.



THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF
BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE,
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES & HOSPITALS

The Purpose of the Environmental Scan

This environmental scan methodology was informed by principles of SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) and Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) environmental prevention strategies through its emphasis on community assessment, environmental monitoring, data-informed planning, and identification of emerging public health risks. Rhode Island's cannabis market has significantly evolved from 2006 to the present, shifting from a restricted medical cannabis framework to a fully regulated adult-use marketplace characterized by expanded product variety and broader retail access.

As emerging cannabinoid product trends continue to reshape community retail environments, this report focused on hemp-derived tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD) beverages. Environmental scanning serves as a crucial tool for examining how products are marketed, displayed, sold, and integrated into local communities. By assessing product availability, retail access, marketing practices, regulatory conditions, and broader environmental influences, these scans help identify emerging risks, opportunities, and prevention priorities.

This report provides a structured snapshot of Rhode Island's evolving hemp-derived THC and CBD beverage retail environment. Findings support evidence-informed prevention planning, policy development, and community health strategies by identifying retail trends, environmental influences, and product patterns that may impact community health, substance use perceptions, and future prevention priorities.

Methodology

Observations were conducted by coalition representatives across six participating regions of Rhode Island as part of an environmental scan methodology designed to assess the availability and retail presence of hemp-derived cannabis products. Scans took place between Spring 2025 and Fall 2025.

Coalition staff visited retail establishments within their communities, including liquor stores, convenience stores, and other retailers where hemp-derived THC and/or CBD beverages were sold or marketed. Data was collected through Excel spreadsheets, Google Forms, and written summaries documenting findings during site visits.



THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF
BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE,
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES & HOSPITALS

Coalition teams also met with the BHDDH Prevention Unit to review findings, discuss regional observations, and provide additional context from the field.

The scan captured information related to:

- Product labels
- Nutrition facts
- Brands
- Beverage types
- THC/CBD content
- Packaging characteristics
- Licensing status
- Warning signage
- Product placement
- In-store prompts and marketing messages

Coalition staff utilized a structured survey tool during in-person visits to document:

- Retail location type
- Product availability
- Retailer licensing status
- Beverage categories
- THC/CBD concentrations
- Packaging characteristics



THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF
BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE,
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES & HOSPITALS

- Advertising presence
- Warning signage

When hemp-derived THC or CBD beverages were present, staff recorded detailed product information for up to ten products per location to provide a representative snapshot of available offerings.

Information collected through this observational methodology was compiled and summarized to identify emerging patterns within local retail environments. While this methodology provided a consistent framework for data collection, the number of locations assessed varied across regions due to differences in retail density, geographic scope, and coalition capacity. As such, findings presented in this report reflect a point-in-time snapshot of retail environments during the period in which scans were conducted.

Rhode Island's Regional Prevention System Overview

Rhode Island's prevention system is organized into seven regional prevention coalitions serving communities across the state. Together, they are known as Regional Prevention Task Forces (RPTFs), allowing Rhode Island to coordinate statewide prevention priorities while preserving strong local connections and community-specific sensitivity. RPTFs play an important role in identifying emerging substance use trends, assessing environmental influences, and supporting evidence-based prevention planning. They provide oversight and technical support to municipal coalitions while working across prevention sectors such as: community and family supports, media communications, business and employers, civic and volunteer organizations, local government and policy stakeholders. Through these partnerships, coalitions assess community conditions and develop prevention strategies that reflect local needs.

Participating regions included:

- Region 1 – Southern Providence
- Region 2 – Blackstone Valley



THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF
BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE,
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES & HOSPITALS

- Region 4 – Kent County
- Region 5 – East Bay
- Region 6 – Newport County
- Region 7 – South County

Through direct retail observations, coalition representatives collected valuable data regarding product availability, marketing practices, licensing visibility, and retail conditions associated with hemp-derived THC and CBD beverages. These observations provided important insight into how evolving cannabinoid product markets are entering communities and reshaping local retail environments. Although environmental scanning of hemp-derived cannabis products was not a formal contractual requirement, this initiative emerged organically through coalition community engagement, observation, and BHDDH's broader prevention planning efforts. This collaborative work reflects the adaptability of Rhode Island's prevention infrastructure in responding to emerging substance use trends and evolving commercial markets.

The Evolving Cannabis and Hemp Regulatory Landscape

Rhode Island's cannabis and hemp regulatory framework has evolved rapidly within the last two decades, creating new opportunities for retail market expansion while simultaneously increasing the importance of prevention-based monitoring. Since the legalization of medical cannabis in 2006 and the passage of the Rhode Island Cannabis Act in 2022, the state has transitioned from a restricted medical cannabis model to a broader adult-use marketplace characterized by expanded product diversity, increased retail competition, and wider consumer access. The legalization of adult-use cannabis, coupled with the increased growth of hemp-derived cannabinoid products, has introduced cannabis-adjacent products into an increasingly diverse range of retail settings, including liquor stores, convenience stores, and other non-traditional establishments. This broader retail integration has expanded consumer access while also contributing to evolving public perceptions regarding cannabis-derived products.

Emerging consumer trends suggest that cannabis and hemp-derived products may increasingly be perceived not only within a recreational context, but also through wellness-oriented, alternative health, or perceived therapeutic uses. Unlike substances such as alcohol or nicotine, cannabis-



THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF
BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE,
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES & HOSPITALS

derived products often occupy multiple consumer spaces, which may broaden appeal across different populations and contribute to increased market penetration. This evolving perception may further accelerate product normalization, increase commercial visibility, and influence broader community attitudes regarding cannabis use.

At the federal level, ongoing national discussions regarding cannabis scheduling and potential rescheduling continue to shape the broader policy landscape, with implications for research, regulatory consistency, medical frameworks, and increased market development. While federal policy remains in transition, these evolving discussions emphasize the importance of state-level surveillance, adaptive prevention planning, and evidence-informed policy development to address changing commercial environments and public health considerations.

In Rhode Island, the Cannabis Control Commission (CCC) now serves as the independent state authority responsible for licensing, regulation, and enforcement of adult-use, medical cannabis, industrial hemp, and hemp-derived cannabinoid products. Prior to the CCC assuming full regulatory authority on May 1, 2025, oversight responsibilities were managed through the Office of Cannabis Regulation (OCR) within the Department of Business Regulation (DBR). Since this transition, the CCC has merged oversight of retail, cultivation, processing, testing, product safety, labeling, and marketing requirements under a more centralized regulatory framework.

This evolving policy environment reflects the need for balanced approaches that recognize both market growth and the behavioral health responsibilities associated with expanded cannabis commercialization. As hemp-derived THC and CBD beverages continue to expand into broader retail environments, prevention-based environmental scanning serves as an increasingly important strategy for monitoring product availability, retail access, marketing practices, and community-level normalization trends.

This shift in the regulatory landscape underscores the importance of cross-agency collaboration and prevention science ensure that emerging cannabis markets are monitored in ways that support behavioral health, community safety, and evidence-based prevention priorities. These efforts strengthen Rhode Island's ability to better understand shifting consumer perceptions that may influence substance use environments across communities while informing strategic prevention planning.



THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF
BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE,
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES & HOSPITALS

Findings / Regional Breakdown

Observations conducted across participating Rhode Island prevention coalitions identified the growing presence of hemp-derived THC and CBD beverages across a broad range of retail environments statewide, including liquor stores, convenience stores, and other non-traditional retail establishments. Products were consistently observed in both licensed and non-licensed retail settings, demonstrating expanding availability beyond traditional cannabis-exclusive markets and reflecting the growing variety of Rhode Island's cannabinoid retail landscape.

Statewide Retail Findings

Region	Stores Scanned	Stores with THC/CBD Beverages	Primary Stores	Key Observations
Region 1: Southern Providence	31	18	Primarily liquor stores; one convenience/gas station	Mixed licensing visibility; strong product placement; internal/external advertising
Region 2: Blackstone Valley	15	3	Liquor, convenience, smoke/gas	Lower product presence; licensing inconsistencies; additional scans planned
Region 4: Kent County	31	24	Primarily liquor stores	High product density; broad product availability; variable signage
Region 5: East Bay	35	9	Liquor, convenience, brewery	Moderate product presence; mixed retail environments
Region 6: Newport County	26	16	Primarily liquor stores	Broad product diversity; inconsistent signage and advertising
Region 7: South County	20	10	Primarily liquor stores	THC/CBD beverages identified across region; continued surveillance recommended



**THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF
BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE,
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES & HOSPITALS**

Findings varied by region but consistently demonstrated increasing market penetration of hemp-derived cannabinoid beverages across Rhode Island communities. Results suggest that product availability varies by catchment area, with some regions showing widespread retail dissemination while others reflect more emerging product markets. Liquor stores were the most dominant retail setting statewide; however, product presence in convenience stores, breweries, and gas stations signals an expanding normalization into broader consumer spaces.

Retail observations revealed substantial product variety, including hemp-derived seltzers, teas, drink packets, and other beverage formulations with varying THC and CBD concentrations. Non-alcoholic hemp-derived beverages containing approximately 5 mg THC per serving were the most commonly observed product category statewide, even though higher-dose and multi-serving products were also identified in several regions. This variation indicates that hemp-derived cannabinoid beverages are increasingly integrated into mainstream consumer markets in Rhode Island.

Marketing and display practices commonly included strategic product placement, in-store promotional materials, visually appealing packaging, and in some cases, exterior advertising. These retail practices may increase public visibility, shape consumer attitudes, and contribute to broader normalization of cannabinoid beverage products. Packaging and branding approaches may also create misconceptions regarding product safety, potency, or intended use, particularly when marketed within a wellness-oriented or recreational context.

Access-related observations identified varying levels of warning signage, product labeling, age restriction communication, and retailer licensing transparency. Inconsistencies in consumer-facing warnings and regulatory visibility may create challenges for public understanding of product contents, intoxicating potential, legal status, and associated health risks. The presence of products across diverse retail settings underscores the importance of continued monitoring as product markets expand.

Collectively, statewide findings suggest that Rhode Island's hemp-derived THC and CBD beverage market is rapidly evolving within a shifting commercial, regulatory, and public health environment. Expanded commercialization and retail variation may increasingly impact consumer perceptions, community exposure, and substance use environments.



THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF
BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE,
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES & HOSPITALS

Behavioral Health and Safety Considerations

From a behavioral health perspective, increased product access and normalization may contribute to broader public health and safety concerns, including:

- Increased product accessibility across mainstream retail environments
- Greater consumer exposure and normalization
- Product misconceptions related to safety, dosage, or therapeutic benefit
- Elevated risk of cannabis-impaired driving
- Accidental ingestion, particularly among youth or children
- Poison control exposures
- Potential shifts in youth and adult substance use perceptions
- Expanded commercialization influencing community norms.

Observed inconsistencies in warning signage, licensing transparency, and packaging may create barriers to informed consumer decision-making, particularly as products are often marketed in ways that may resemble alcohol alternatives, wellness beverages, or recreational consumer goods. The presence of multi-serving containers, higher-dose products, and broad retail placement may also increase risks of overconsumption or misunderstanding regarding potency.

Emerging prevention literature suggests that increased cannabis product density and broader commercialization may be associated with higher rates of cannabis-related emergency visits, poison control incidents, and impaired driving concerns. Recent Rhode Island behavioral health surveillance further reinforces the importance of monitoring evolving cannabinoid product markets. According to the 2024 Rhode Island Young Adult Survey (RIYAS) and 2024 Rhode Island Student Survey (RISS), cannabis remains a significant prevention concern statewide. Findings indicate that 46% of Rhode Island young adults ages 18–25 reported lifetime cannabis use, while 11% met criteria for cannabis use disorder. Among Rhode Island youth, 7.8% of middle school students and 15% of high school students reported past 30-day marijuana use. Additionally, perceived harm remains an important prevention consideration, as youth perceptions of risk influence substance use behaviors. These data points highlight that cannabis use, accessibility, and normalization remain ongoing behavioral health priorities across multiple age groups in Rhode Island.

These findings are particularly relevant as hemp-derived THC beverages expand into mainstream retail settings. Rhode Island behavioral health data also highlights the importance of monitoring cannabis-related impairment concerns. As hemp-derived THC beverages become more visible and accessible, prevention infrastructure should continue addressing risks related to impaired driving, public safety, and misconceptions that legal or widely available products may carry lower risk. Increased product visibility,



THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF
BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE,
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES & HOSPITALS

broader retail access, and normalization through consumer marketing may further influence perceptions of harm, accessibility, and substance use behaviors—particularly among youth and young adults already identified as priority prevention populations. While Rhode Island’s cannabinoid market continues to evolve, these findings highlight the importance of proactively monitoring how market expansion, product visibility, and consumer perceptions may affect behavioral health outcomes.

Limitations

Findings presented in this report should be interpreted as a point-in-time snapshot of Rhode Island’s evolving hemp-derived cannabinoid beverage market. While participating coalitions utilized a consistent observational framework, the quantity of retail establishments scanned varied by region due to differences in coalition capacity, geographic scope, retail density, and local participation. Additionally, licensing and regulatory information may have been affected by ongoing oversight transitions during the scan period, potentially influencing retailer practices, product availability, and reporting. As such, findings are intended to inform prevention planning, environmental monitoring, and strategic decision-making rather than serve as a comprehensive census of all cannabinoid product retailers statewide. These findings reinforce the importance of maintaining adaptive prevention systems—as evolving cannabis and hemp-derived markets continue to reshape retail environments, consumer perceptions, and community-level substance use exposure across Rhode Island.

Key Takeaways / Statewide Prevention and Strategic Planning Implications

These findings reinforce environmental monitoring as an essential behavioral health prevention strategy. Coalition-led environmental scans provide critical insight into:

- Market trends
- Product availability
- Consumer access
- Marketing practices
- Regulatory transitions
- Community exposure



THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF
BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE,
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES & HOSPITALS

This information supports evidence-informed prevention planning, policy development, and strategic public health responses aimed at influencing both formal regulations and broader community norms.

Prevention-Informed Strategic Priorities

Rhode Island's prevention systems may benefit from adaptive, evidence-informed strategies that address retail exposure, consumer education, community safety, and regulatory coordination. Recommended strategies may include:

- Retail density monitoring
- Advertising and marketing restrictions
- Retail product placement regulations
- Consumer education and public awareness campaigns
- Safe storage and accidental ingestion prevention initiatives
- Youth prevention messaging
- Enhanced warning label and packaging standards
- Retailer compliance education
- Continued coalition-led environmental surveillance and statewide monitoring

Conclusion

Overall, Rhode Island's hemp-derived THC and CBD beverage market reflects a rapidly increasing retail environment shaped by regulatory change, product diversification, and shifting consumer perceptions. As commercialization continues to expand, prevention infrastructure must remain responsive to ensure that public health, behavioral health, and community safety remain central to policy discussions and prevention planning. These statewide findings reinforce the critical role of ongoing environmental scans in informing prevention priorities, guiding strategic policy development, and supporting Rhode Island's ability to respond effectively to emerging cannabinoid product markets through evidence-based prevention science.