



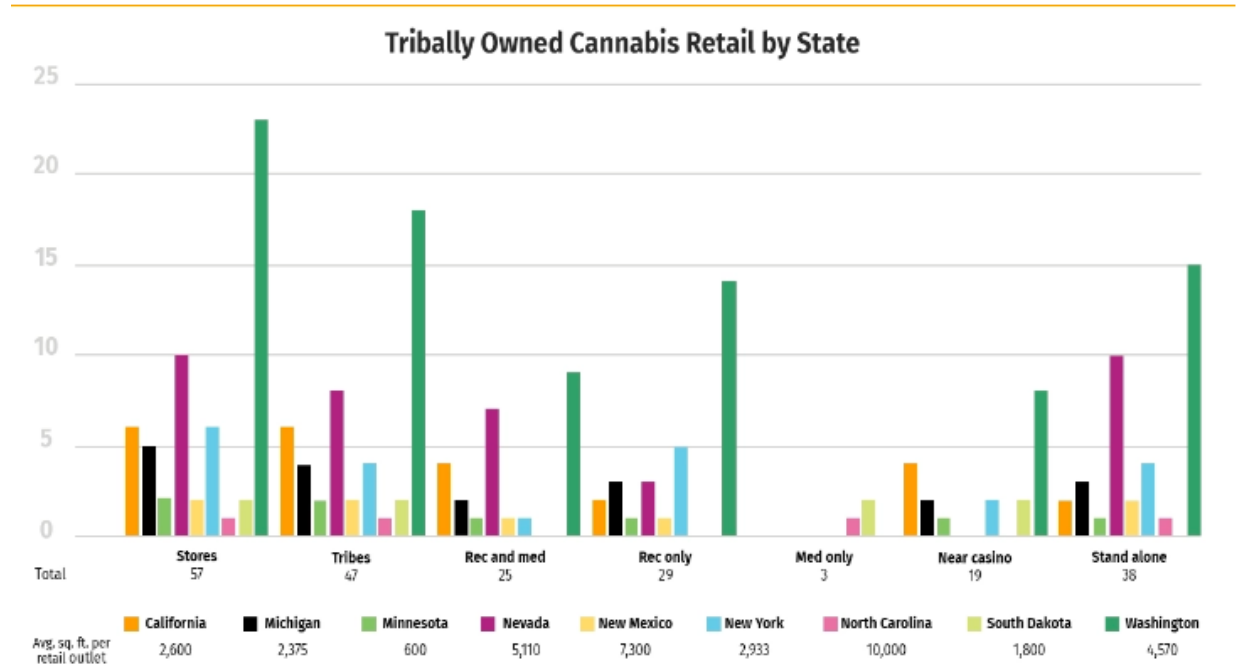
Tribally owned marijuana store numbers up 25% since 2023

By **Matthew Klas**
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Marijuana businesses owned and operated by Native American tribes experienced strong growth in the past year.

Tribally owned cannabis retailers have continued to open across the United States as tribes have looked to diversify their economies, assert their sovereignty and seize the first-to-market advantage in certain states.

The U.S. government recognizes 574 Native American tribes, and roughly 350 are in the contiguous 48 states.



As sovereign nations, tribes’ marijuana laws might differ from state statutes that are applicable off tribal lands. Tribal laws can be more restrictive – such as banning cannabis use even in states where recreational marijuana has been legalized – but they also can be more permissive than state laws.

Growing cannabis markets

As of May 2024, there are 57 tribally owned medical marijuana dispensaries and adult-use stores in nine states.

The number of tribally owned retailers has grown by roughly 25% since January 2023. Many of these stores are located on tribal lands, but some are on non-tribal land.

The stores in the graphic on the previous page are owned by 47 different tribes, an increase of approximately 30% since January 2023.

Cannabis retailers large and small

Nationwide, the average size for a tribal cannabis store is roughly 4,300 square feet, although sizes range from less than 1,000 square feet to elaborate complexes exceeding 10,000 square feet.

The NuWu Cannabis Marketplace in Las Vegas, owned by the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe, is among the largest marijuana retail stores in the world.

The majority of tribal cannabis retailers offer recreational marijuana, but many also offer MMJ to cardholding patients.

Two tribally owned dispensaries in South Dakota and one in North Carolina currently offer medical marijuana only.

About three-quarters of the tribes with marijuana retail also own and operate casinos: 19 of the 57 retailers listed above are located near a tribal casino.

For many of these tribes with gaming, marijuana represents an important economic diversification effort.

Washington state has the most tribal retailers with 23 stores as well as the most tribes operating shops at 18.

Nevada has the second-highest number of tribal stores at 10, which are owned by eight different tribes.

Most of the tribally owned dispensaries are located in markets where recreational cannabis is state-regulated.

However, there are exceptions.

New model for tribal cannabis retail

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' Great Smoky Cannabis Co. is the only legal dispensary in North Carolina, where both medical and recreational marijuana are illegal outside the tribe's jurisdiction.

The 10,000-square-foot facility opened in April 2024 and features three drive-thru windows, a flower room, a kitchen for producing edibles, a glass-accessories shop and a spacious retail floor with an array of budtender stations.

The tribe currently is selling only to patrons with either an approved, out-of-state medical marijuana card or a tribal MMJ patient card.

New market launches

In Minnesota and New York, Native American tribes have been first-movers in their respective markets.

Minnesota legalized recreational marijuana in 2023.

However, the state-licensed adult-use marketplace is unlikely to open until at least 2025 – a particularly lengthy gap between legalization and the opening of the regulated market.

Several Native American tribes in Minnesota are helping to bridge that gap and seize a first-to-market opportunity.

Dispensaries opened by the Red Lake Nation and White Earth Nation currently are serving adult-use customers in northern Minnesota, and both tribes have plans for additional facilities.

Closer to the Twin Cities, the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe is constructing a 50,000-square-foot cannabis-cultivation facility as part of a seed-to-sale operation that is positioned to capitalize on high expected demand.

The facility will be significantly larger than any state-licensed grow operations, which are capped at 30,000 square feet.

The Prairie Island Indian Community also is planning to open a recreational marijuana store this summer.

Big business in New York

New York, another state that initially was slow to license retailers, has seen the opening of three tribally owned stores since January 2023.

For example, the Shinnecock Indian Nation opened Little Beach Harvest on tribal land in the Hamptons late last year.

The store does not charge state tax, although a small “community fee” is added to retail sales.

Other tribes in New York that have opened cannabis stores include the Cayuga Nation, Oneida Indian Nation and Seneca Nation.

The companies listed in the above graphic do not include businesses that are owned by individual tribal members as opposed to a tribal government. There are dozens of such tribal-member-owned cannabis retailers across the country.

As sovereign nations with legislative and regulatory bodies, some tribal governments license tribal members to open their own businesses. For example, the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Cannabis Control Board currently licenses 20 retail operations, up from 17 in early 2023.

There are also dozens of tribally owned and tribal-member-owned cannabis businesses across the country outside the retail sector: Many tribes have opened cultivation and manufacturing operations, some of which are part of vertically integrated tribal businesses.

The future of tribal cannabis businesses

Further growth can be expected in the next 12 months, and Minnesota will be particularly interesting to watch.

There are 11 federally recognized tribes within state borders, and Minnesota’s cannabis laws are designed to leave room for tribal sovereignty. State-licensed retail operations are unlikely to open soon. As a result, Minnesota could see some of the fastest growth of tribal cannabis businesses in the United States.

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