



There will be no baggies of pot awaiting patients next week, when Minnesota joins 21 other states in offering medical marijuana. No glass pipes, no plants to tend at home. Instead, the nation's latest medical marijuana programme is a world of pill bottles and vials of marijuana-infused oil.

For the qualifying patients seeking relief from pain, medical marijuana advocates and some lawmakers, Wednesday isn't the finish line, but the first step. The state's restrictive approach, unseen in the industry, is likely to mean high costs, long drives and reluctant doctors.

"The door is opening," said Bob Cappechi of the Marijuana Policy Project, a national outfit that pushes to loosen marijuana laws. "This will start helping people out. That's really what this is all about."

Minnesota's medical marijuana advocates snatched an unlikely victory from the legislature last year after years of failed efforts, but there was little celebration. What emerged to assuage skeptical law enforcement lobbyists and a wary governor was one of the strictest programs in the nation.

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