A2LA Cannabis Testing Laboratory Accreditation Program – Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the goal of A2LA’s Cannabis Testing Laboratory Program?
A: The goal of A2LA’s Cannabis Testing Laboratory Accreditation Program is to promote confidence to users and regulators with regard to the safety of medical and recreational marijuana through the accreditation of cannabis testing laboratories and (when relevant) inspection bodies.

Q: What standards are used to accredit laboratories or inspection bodies under A2LA’s Cannabis Testing Laboratory Program and who recognizes this accreditation?
A: Cannabis testing laboratories are accredited to ISO/IEC 17025:2005 and any additional requirements that may be specified by the state in which the laboratory resides or does business. The ISO 17025 standard is non-prescriptive and is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of any laboratory. Additionally, ISO/IEC 17025 accreditation is an internationally-recognized statement of competency and can be valuable as a marketing tool. Since, in some cases, there is also a possible inspection component to the evaluation of cannabis (which may include visual or other inspection for properties such as trichome maturity, mite damage, mold spores, odor, etc.), accreditation for these types of inspection activities would be granted within the ISO/IEC 17020:2012 A2LA Inspection Body Accreditation Program.

Q: What areas of my laboratory or inspection body will the assessor look at?
A: An A2LA assessment includes a thorough examination of the organization’s compliance with the requirements of ISO/IEC 17025 (and the inspection body’s compliance to ISO/IEC 17020), its compliance with its own internal policies and procedures as well as compliance to any applicable state specific requirements. Additionally, for each applicant to the A2LA accreditation program, a Scope of Accreditation is drafted. This document is a list of all of the tests or inspections for which the organization is seeking accreditation. A2LA assessors perform an assessment of the methods or inspections listed on the Scope to ensure that the organization is technically competent to perform them. It is important to note that this technical assessment is limited to activities directly related to the tests and/or inspections on the proposed Scope of Accreditation, allowing applicants to manage the areas they wish to have assessed. Organizations may apply for as many or as few tests and/or inspections as they wish.

Q: What does A2LA accreditation cost?
A: The cost to obtain accreditation will vary depending on the size of the organization seeking accreditation, the number of tests and/or inspections on the proposed Scope of Accreditation, and the organization’s readiness for assessment. Estimates are available at no cost for interested parties and discounts are available for multi-location organizations.
Q: **What resources are available to aid in the accreditation process?**

A: A2LA assigns a dedicated Accreditation Officer to every single applicant. This person is a point of contact for the organization for the lifetime of their accreditation, providing assistance and support throughout the accreditation process. Roger Brauninger and Michelle Bradac are the Accreditation Officers and primary points of contact for A2LA’s Cannabis Testing Laboratory Program and are available at Rbrauninger@A2LA.org (301-644-3233) and Mbradac@A2LA.org (301-655-3227) to answer questions and to provide free estimates.

Additionally, to assist organizations in preparing for accreditation, A2LA offers commercially available training courses on the preparation and implementation of a quality management system and specific aspects of the standard such as root cause analysis and corrective action. Please visit the A2LA training program page at [www.a2la.org/training/index.cfm](http://www.a2la.org/training/index.cfm) for a list of upcoming courses.

Q: **How is A2LA governed as an Accreditation Body?**

A: A2LA is a signatory to the ILAC (International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation [www.ilac.org](http://www.ilac.org)) Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA). This means that A2LA has been found to be compliant with ISO/IEC 17011, the standard by which accreditation bodies are to operate, and has been found to accredit laboratories to ISO/IEC 17025 and inspection bodies to ISO/IEC 17020 in a manner consistent with other MRA signatory accreditation bodies around the world. A2LA is regularly evaluated by a panel of its MRA signatory peers to ensure continued compliance. Due to A2LA’s ILAC recognition, accredited organizations find that A2LA maintains a process that ensures the ISO/IEC 17025 and ISO/IEC 17020 standards are applied fairly to all organizations without bias or inconsistent interpretations.

Q: **What factors should states consider when developing legislation for allowing compassionate use of [Medical] Marijuana?**

A: There are many approaches to consider while developing a state accreditation program for laboratories. To summarize likely options, the state could either:

1. Develop a list of criteria for laboratory performance and quality assurance, develop an inspection protocol, provide inspectors, and accredit laboratories themselves based upon these criteria; or

2. Make accreditation by the state contingent upon the laboratory being accredited by an ILAC-recognized accreditation body that has assessed the laboratory to the relevant international standard such as ISO/IEC 17025 (testing) and/or ISO/IEC 17020 (inspection); or

3. Make accreditation by the state contingent upon prior accreditation of the laboratory by an ILAC-recognized accreditation body that has assessed the laboratory to the relevant international standard such as ISO/IEC 17025 (testing) or ISO/IEC 17020 (inspection) and impose additional criteria that the state would deem necessary, such as specifying test methods, proficiency testing requirements, etc.

All of these options would be a step above what most states require for cannabis testing laboratories. Requiring ISO/IEC 17025 and/or ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation, as a component of recognition by the state, is the most stringent option and provides the state with the most assurance that the laboratory is performing acceptably. It would also provide the public with the most assurance that the state is doing all that it can to ensure the integrity of testing and/or inspection.