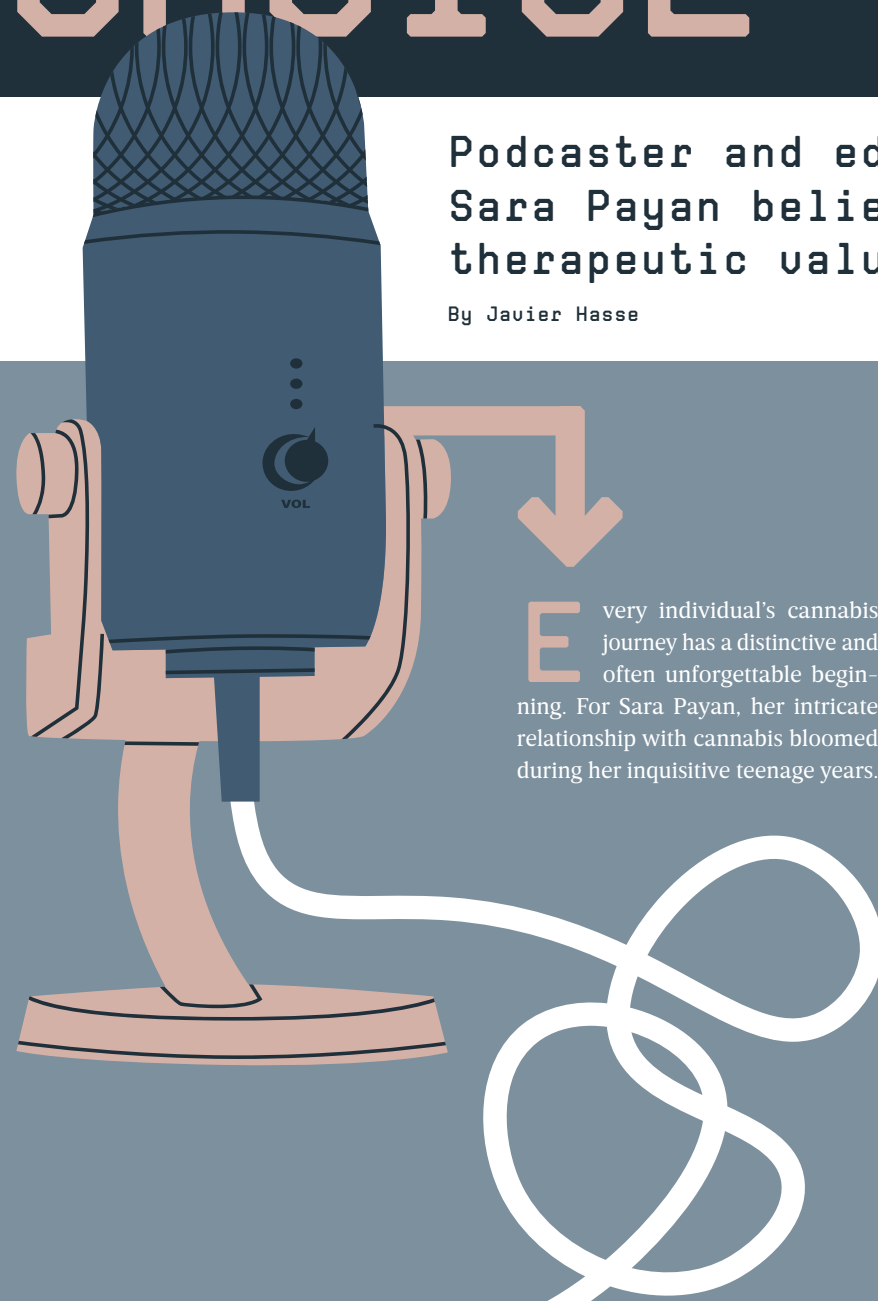


EMPOWERING CHOICE

Podcaster and educator Sara Payan believes in the therapeutic value of cannabis.

By Javier Hasse



Every individual's cannabis journey has a distinctive and often unforgettable beginning. For Sara Payan, her intricate relationship with cannabis bloomed during her inquisitive teenage years.

Initially sparked by youthful curiosity, her engagement with the plant took on an intensely personal and transformative dimension in her 30s. Confronted with a diagnosis of stage III colon cancer, Payan grappled with the dual challenges of the disease itself and the debilitating aftermath of chemotherapy. Cannabis became her safe place, alleviating the intense pain and overpowering nausea. That life-changing event led to Payan's path towards cannabis education and advocacy.

With her podcast, *Planted with Sara Payan*, she's featured a confluence of diverse voices including musicians David Crosby and Steven Van Zandt as well as policymakers like Rep. Earl Blumenauer. Her journey in the cannabis industry has included educating others about the benefits of the plant and advocating for patients on city and state advisory boards. Payan's growing legacy hints at a promising future when cannabis is celebrated for its immense potential. »



Podcaster Sara Payan in her element.





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— Sara Payan

A Catalyst for Change

Payan utilized medical cannabis in her cancer recovery and to combat the effects of chemotherapy, but her insights into the therapeutic potential of cannabis were not just borne out of personal experience. Her family background, especially her mother's immersion in medical research as a cancer investigator and

hematology oncology nurse, provided her with a unique perspective. This familial bond armed her with an early appreciation of the many benefits of cannabis, especially in managing debilitating symptoms.

During Payan's intensive cancer treatment, her interactions with dispensaries revealed a stark concern: the evident dearth of comprehensive consumer education.

“I didn't feel empowered in my choices,” she says.

One particular incident, where inadequate guidance on edible consumption led to an overwhelming high during a medical consultation, was especially illuminating. These experiences, far from being isolated personal setbacks, underscored a broader challenge faced by people who turn to cannabis for its use as a medicine.

As director of education and public education officer for the Apothecarium in San Francisco, California, Payan was able to focus on her mission to address the prevalent knowledge gap surrounding medicinal use of the plant. Alongside educational endeavors, she championed the principle of compassionate use and conceptualized and rolled out a pioneering program offering free cannabis to the critically and chronically ill, especially those from economically constrained backgrounds.

Podcaster, Writer, Advocate, & Consultant

While Payan's contributions at the dispensary level were undeniably impactful, she recognized an overarching need for systemic reform. This realization propelled her into the arena of policymaking.

“I decided to get involved in policy and I was one of the co-chairs for the legalization task force for San Francisco,” Payan says.

But her advocacy didn't end there. Representing medical cannabis patients, she emerged as a vital voice on the San Francisco Cannabis Oversight Committee and the California Cannabis Advisory Committee.

“The biggest thing was helping city officials really take it seriously and understand that this is a viable industry, and all the amazing things that it can create for not only the people working in it but for the public,” Payan says. “We have a lot of work to do still.”

As Payan's commitment continued to grow, she found

a fresh channel in her podcast, *Planted with Sara Payan* which began in 2019. The central ethos of Payan's podcast is clear: to cultivate informed, open dialogues about cannabis.

“We're really talking about education, policy,” she says, spotlighting the need to challenge prevailing stigmas and outdated notions.

Despite the advancements in legalization, misinformation, especially in mainstream media, remains a pressing concern for Payan.

“A lot of the stuff coming out of the mainstream press isn't necessarily correct,” she says.

To counteract these skewed narratives, Payan has written for various publications ensuring that nuanced perspectives reach a wide audience. Down this line, she underscores the pivotal role journalists play in crafting narratives.

“Responsible journalism is paramount in ensuring that the true essence of cannabis and its community is portrayed,” she says.

Apart from her podcast, Payan has carved a niche as a respected consultant in the cannabis space. Her blend of personal experiences and professional acumen positions her uniquely, allowing her to provide invaluable insights. In her view, empathy in the cannabis industry is paramount and requires a consumer-centric approach rooted in understanding and compassion. **HT**

