



Medical Marijuana Overview

Medical marijuana is a safe and effective treatment option for a broad range of serious medical conditions. Support from the medical community, state and federal lawmakers, and the public — combined with a large and growing body of scientific research — has led to 33 states and the District of Columbia enacting effective medical marijuana programs over the last 20-plus years. These laws are working well and protecting patients.

Medical Marijuana Is a Safe and Effective Treatment Option

- Hundreds of thousands of patients suffering from HIV/AIDS, cancer, multiple sclerosis, Crohn's disease, seizure disorders, chronic pain, and other ailments have found that marijuana provides relief from their symptoms. Although the federal government has made research marijuana's medical value uniquely difficult, dozens of studies in both the U.S. and abroad have shown what these patients have found to be true: medical marijuana works.
- **Available prescription drugs, like opiates, often come with far more serious side effects than marijuana.** Marijuana's side effects are modest compared to many prescription drugs' risks, and it appears to be impossible to fatally overdose on cannabis — unlike opiates and other dangerous medications that are prescribed every day. Research shows marijuana can allow pain patients to reduce or eliminate their use of dangerous opiates. Surveys of medical cannabis patients in Minnesota and Michigan found that more than 60% of pain patients who had been prescribed opiates were able to reduce or eliminate their use of opiates.
- **Many patients who find relief from marijuana simply do not respond to prescription medications.** As the Institute of Medicine noted in its extensive report on medical marijuana, "there will likely always be a subpopulation of patients who do not respond well to other medications." Indeed, some children suffering from intractable seizure disorders have been able to significantly reduce or completely eliminate seizures by using cannabis oils in addition to or in place of other medications. Studies have also found that patients whose neuropathic pain did not respond to other medications found relief from cannabis.
- **Some opponents seek to limit medical marijuana access to oils or pills, but like any medication, doctors and patients should have access to all safe and effective options that exist.** Smoking and vaporizing marijuana are much more effective delivery methods than pills for many patients, because they can assess the effect immediately and increase dosage in small increments. Manufactured edibles are another important option, because they are easier for some patients to ingest. With proper regulation, the products will produce consistent effects with each treatment.

Federal Law Does Not Stand In the Way

- **Federal law does not prevent states from removing state criminal penalties for the medical use of marijuana.** Nothing in the U.S. Constitution or federal law prohibits states from enacting penalties that differ from federal law.

- Since late 2014, Congress' appropriations acts have included riders to prevent federal funds from being used to interfere with medical marijuana laws. President Donald Trump has signaled his support for allowing state marijuana laws to function without federal interference.
- A federal appellate court ruled that the federal government cannot punish — or even investigate — physicians for discussing or recommending the medical use of marijuana with patients.

There Is Overwhelming, Bipartisan Support for Allowing Medical Marijuana

- National polls consistently find 60-94% of Americans support medical marijuana.
- Since November 2016, voters in Arkansas, Florida, Missouri, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and Utah — all states where voters chose Donald Trump — have approved medical marijuana initiatives.
- **Most states recognize the medical value of marijuana.** In addition to the 33 state medical marijuana laws, 16 other states have passed laws that recognize the medical value of at least some cannabis preparations.
- In February 2013, the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that 76 percent of surveyed physicians would recommend medical marijuana to a patient.
- The American Medical Association, the Institute of Medicine, and the American College of Physicians have all acknowledged the potential benefits of medical marijuana. In addition, several other major U.S. health organizations support access to medical marijuana, including the American Public Health Association, the American Nurses Association, the American Academy of HIV Medicine, the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, the Lymphoma Foundation of America, the Epilepsy Foundation, the Multiple Sclerosis Society, and the state medical societies of New York, Rhode Island, and California.

Medical Marijuana Laws Are Working Well

- **No state that has enacted medical marijuana legislation has later repealed it.** In fact, after seeing that the laws were working and not causing problems, many states have expanded their programs to include more qualifying conditions and regulated dispensing, lower fees for patients, and more types of practitioners who can issue recommendations.
- **Medical marijuana laws do not lead to increased teen marijuana usage.** In the 27 states where programs have been fully implemented, government surveys have produced before-and-after data on teens' marijuana use. In 21 of those states, the data indicates overall decreases, 12 of which were outside confidence intervals.
- In states with medical marijuana laws, it is not uncommon for law enforcement to initially be wary of or opposed to the proposal; but post-enactment, they often recognize that it is not causing problems. For example, the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association executive director, Dennis Flaherty, had strenuously opposed allowing medical marijuana. However, a year after enactment, he did not oppose adding intractable pain to the program. As a local paper reported, Flaherty "said police are unaware of any problems with the current cannabis program and do not expect any now that pain will be included."