



## Severe Pain and Medical Cannabis

According to the Institute of Medicine, chronic pain costs our nation \$635 billion each year in medical treatment and lost productivity. While prescription medicines and surgical procedures work for some patients, others' pain is resistant to treatment. Even for patients who respond to prescription medicines, those medications can be far more dangerous than cannabis, both in terms of toxicity and addictive potential. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 15,000 Americans die each year from overdoses on prescription opiates.

Numerous studies have established that cannabis is an effective treatment for pain. Research has also shown that patients may be able to reduce their use of opiates by using cannabis as an adjunct treatment.

Regardless of whether the severe pain is a result of a catastrophic injury, shingles diagnosis, or rare disease, it is cruel to deny individuals access to this treatment option if their doctor thinks the benefits outweigh potential risks. Two of the four patients who have been receiving federal marijuana for decades under a program closed to new patients receive it for rare conditions that cause debilitating pain — stockbroker Irvin Rosenfeld of Florida suffers from multiple congenital cartilaginous exostoses, while George McMahon of Iowa has nail patella. Twenty-one of the 28 state medical cannabis laws would allow patients such as Irvin and George to qualify.

### Selected References

"Nausea, appetite loss, pain, and anxiety are all afflictions of wasting and all can be mitigated by marijuana."

—Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences (1999).

"Results [from randomized clinical trials on smoked cannabis and neuropathic pain] consistently indicated that cannabis significantly reduced pain intensity, with patients reporting 34%-40% decrease on cannabis compared to 17-20% on placebo. Moreover a significantly greater proportion of individuals reported at least 30% reduction in pain on cannabis (46%-52%) compared to placebo (18%-24%), which is relevant since 30% decrease in pain intensity is generally associated with reports of improved life quality."

— Igor Grant, MD, director of the Center for Medicinal Cannabis Research, et al., "Medical Marijuana: Clearing Away the Smoke," *Open Neurology* (2012).

"Cannabis is an extremely safe and effective medication for many patients with chronic pain. In stark contrast to opioids and other available pain medications, cannabis is relatively non-addicting and has the best safety record of any known pain medication (no deaths attributed to overdose or direct effects of medication). Adverse reactions are mild and can be avoided by titration of dosage using smokeless vaporizers."

— Charles Webb, MD and Sandra Webb, RN, "Therapeutic Benefits of Cannabis: A Patient Survey," *Hawaii Journal of Medicine and Public Health* (2014).