



National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws

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The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Testimony of The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws
Regarding needed statutory reforms that would promote veterans' healthcare treatment options

The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) – the nation's largest and oldest marijuana policy reform organization – encourages the passage of pending federal legislation to better facilitate medical cannabis access and oversight among military veterans, specifically HR 1647: The Veterans Equal Access Act and H.R.712: The VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act.

Survey data finds that veterans are increasingly turning to cannabis as a therapeutic option. According to polling data¹ compiled by The American Legion, 39 percent of respondents say that they "know a veteran" who is using the plant medicinally, while 22 percent acknowledge that they personally "use cannabis to treat a mental or physical condition." Separate polling data compiled by the group Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America further reports that 75 percent of military veterans "would be interested in using cannabis or cannabinoid products as a treatment option if it were available."²

It is easy to understand why. Cannabis is well-established, by the National Academy of Sciences and others, to mitigate chronic pain³ – especially neuropathy. Data also indicates that cannabis may potentially address other common health issues experienced by veterans, such as post-traumatic stress and anxiety⁴. Numerous studies⁵ find that patients enrolled in medical cannabis access programs reduce, or in some cases even eliminate, their use of conventional

¹ <https://www.legion.org/veteranshealthcare/239814/survey-shows-veteran-households-support-research-medical-cannabis>

² IAVA 2019 members survey: <https://cultureondemand.com/iava-2019/#step-13>

³ National Academy of Sciences, The Health Effects of Cannabis and Cannabinoids, 2017: "In adults with chronic pain, patients who were treated with cannabis ... are more likely to experience a clinically significant reduction in pain symptoms. ... There is conclusive or substantial evidence that cannabis and cannabinoids are effective for the treatment for chronic pain in adults." <https://www.nap.edu/resource/24625/Cannabis-conclusions.pdf>

⁴ <https://norml.org/library/item/post-traumatic-stress>

⁵ <https://norml.org/marijuana/fact-sheets/item/relationship-between-marijuana-and-opioids>



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pharmaceuticals – particularly opioids and anti-anxiety medications. A recently published study⁶ of military veterans participating in a California medical cannabis cooperative reported that “nearly half the sample reported substituting cannabis for prescription medications,” while many others consumed cannabis in place of alcohol.

The state-compliant use of medical cannabis by veterans would likely be more prevalent if V.A. doctors were not currently forbidden from providing the paperwork necessary to complete a recommendation – thus forcing military veterans to seek the advice of a private, out-of-network physician. This prohibition does not promote public health, as many of these out-of-network physicians provide little follow up care or oversight to these patients. A far better option would be to allow veterans’ primary care physicians the ability to oversee their patients’ medical cannabis care.

In the 114th Congress, majorities in both the US House and Senate endorsed language in the Fiscal Year 2017 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations bill that, for the first time, would have permitted V.A doctors to legally make medical cannabis recommendations in those states which permit it. Unfortunately, however, this language was ultimately removed during conference committee. Now it is up to members of the 116th Congress to address this matter. Our veterans deserve the option to legally access a botanical product that is objectively safer than the litany of pharmaceutical drugs it could replace.

⁶ American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse, 2019, A cross-sectional examination of choice and behavior of veterans with access to free medicinal cannabis: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/31135227>