



The Pennsylvania Association of County Drug and Alcohol Administrators (PACDAA) represents the 47 Single County Authorities (SCAs) of the Commonwealth that are responsible for managing a range of public-funded drug and alcohol prevention, intervention and treatment services in all local communities.

Position Statement regarding Legalization of Marijuana for Medicinal Purposes

November 14, 2014

Given the core mission of our members to provide quality and effective substance abuse prevention, intervention and treatment services, PACDAA is extremely concerned about the public health impact associated with any change in current state or federal laws governing marijuana. Simply put, any increase in access to marijuana will lead to expanded use by all age groups, and will in turn lead to an increase in negative consequences for individuals, families, and communities as a result of this expanded use.

This document is intended to provide a general statement on behalf of our organization regarding the legalization of marijuana for medicinal purposes. We want to emphasize, though, that as specific legislative proposals involving marijuana are being deliberated upon in Pennsylvania, PACDAA wants to be actively involved in those discussions to ensure that implications for substance prevention and treatment services are taken into consideration.

Marijuana as a Medication

PACDAA does not possess the scientific and medical expertise to conduct an independent evaluation of research regarding the potential medicinal benefits of marijuana and its various components. Instead, we have elected to defer to the expertise of various national medical organizations. PACDAA concurs with the following organizational position statements:

- **American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM)**

ASAM recognizes the therapeutic potential of cannabis and cannabinoids, given the recent discovery of the human endocannabinoid receptor system, and supports increased funding for research on marijuana that explores mechanisms of its action, its effects on the human body, and the potential for its clinical application. However, ASAM insists that marijuana, like any other drug, be subject to federal standards for drug approval that establish safety, efficacy and purity and distribution that limits nonmedical uses and diversions.

- **American Psychiatric Association (APA)**

Further research on the use of cannabis-derived substances as medicine should be encouraged and facilitated by the federal government. The adverse effects of marijuana, including, but not limited to, the likelihood of addiction, must be simultaneously studied. If scientific evidence supports the use of cannabis-derived substances to treat specific condition, the medication should be subject to the approval process of the FDA. With regard to states, medical treatment should be evidence-based and determined by professional standards of care.

- American Medical Association (AMA)

The AMA calls for further adequate and well-controlled studies of marijuana and related cannabinoids in patients who have serious conditions for which preclinical, anecdotal, or controlled evidence suggests possible efficacy and the application of such results to the understanding and treatment of disease.

- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)

Adolescents are especially vulnerable to adverse consequences of marijuana use. Medical marijuana dispensing is associated with reduced perception of marijuana-related risks and increased rates of marijuana use among adolescents. AACAP thus opposes medical marijuana dispensing to adolescents.

- American College of Physicians (ACP)

ACP supports programs and funding for rigorous scientific evaluation of the potential therapeutic benefits of medical marijuana and the publication of such findings. ACP supports increased research for conditions where the efficacy of marijuana has been established to determine optimal dosage and route of delivery. Medical marijuana research should not only focus on determining drug efficacy and safety but also on determining efficacy in comparison with other available treatments.

Access to Clinical Trials for Seriously Ill Individuals

PACDAA is very sympathetic to the pain and suffering of those individuals seeking potential relief from severe medical conditions through medications developed as a result of legitimate, scientifically-based marijuana research. However, we do believe strongly that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval process is necessary to ensure the development of safe and effective medications.

We understand, though, that the time involved in conducting careful, rigorous clinical trials can be extremely frustrating for those individuals (and families) currently struggling with serious and urgent life-threatening medical conditions. We are aware that the FDA currently allows patient access to experimental drug therapies through enrollment in clinical trials or through expanded access provisions within its statute and regulations. We strongly encourage the federal government to establish a special program for patients with serious and urgent life-threatening medical conditions to assist them in accessing non-smoked, non-inhaled components of marijuana that are currently undergoing clinical trials as part of the FDA approval process.

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