



Medical Cannabis: Lifting Federal Barriers to Research & Improving Access for Intractable Epilepsy

Position: The Epilepsy Foundation is committed to supporting physician-directed care and to exploring and advocating for all potential treatment options, including medical cannabis and cannabidiol (CBD). **We support lifting federal barriers to research on cannabis and CBD and support access to these potential therapies, through state-regulated programs, for individuals when other treatment options have failed them.** If a patient and their health care team feel that the potential benefits of medical cannabis for uncontrolled epilepsy outweigh the risks, then the patient should have safe, legal access to medical cannabis.

Protecting State Actions: We urge Congress to again enact language in the fiscal year 2019 appropriations bill to prohibit the Department of Justice (DOJ) from interfering with medical cannabis programs legally operating in the states. This language has previously been included in the Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, and the fiscal year 2018 omnibus appropriations bill. Currently, the medical use of cannabis and/or CBD is legal under state law in 47 states and the District of Columbia. However, the stability of these programs is uncertain without a federal guarantee that they can continue to legally operate under the laws of each state. Advancements in this industry are stifled as well; because cannabis and cannabis extracts remain a Schedule I substance under the Controlled Substance Act (CSA). We support the *Compassionate Access, Research Expansion, and Respect States Act* (CARERS, S. 683/ H.R. 1583) which would facilitate safe and legal access to medical cannabis for patients and physicians acting in accordance with state law and lift federal barriers to research.

Eliminating Barriers to Federal Research: Currently, it is difficult and expensive to conduct research into the connection between cannabis and seizures. There are restrictions for all Schedule I substances, and there are additional barriers exclusive to cannabis. The Epilepsy Foundation supports the reintroduction of legislation that would lift federal barriers to research on cannabis. We support the *Cannabidiol Research on Expansion Act* (S. 1276), which would accomplish these goals by directing the Drug Enforcement Administration to move cannabis and CBD out of Schedule I, allowing researchers to access cannabis for study of its potential medical use, and prohibiting federal interference under the Controlled Substances Act with state laws that establish medical cannabis programs.

About Epilepsy: The Epilepsy Foundation is the leading national voluntary health organization that speaks on behalf of more than 3.4 million Americans with epilepsy and seizures. We foster the wellbeing of children and adults affected by seizures through research programs, educational activities, advocacy, and direct services. Epilepsy is a medical condition that produces seizures affecting a variety of mental and physical functions. Approximately 1 in 26 Americans will develop epilepsy at some point in their lifetime.

There is no "one size fits all" treatment for epilepsy, and about a third of people living with epilepsy suffer from uncontrolled or intractable seizures, despite available treatments. Uncontrolled seizures can lead to disability, injury, and even death. This is why people living with uncontrolled seizures turn to medical cannabis and CBD when other options have failed. Medical use of cannabis and/or CBD is legal per state law in 47 states and the District of Columbia, and some people living with uncontrolled seizures have reported beneficial effects and reduced seizure activity when using medical cannabis, especially strains rich in CBD. Not everyone with epilepsy should or would consider medical cannabis as a treatment option, and further research is needed on the connection between cannabis and seizures. This is why we advocate for rescheduling cannabis and lifting barriers to research.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Abbey Roudebush, Government Relations Manager at aroudebush@efa.org or 301-918-3784.