

## National Study Finds Little Proof of Pot's Medical Benefits

[Julie Borg](#) | *WORLD News Service* | Friday, January 27, 2017



Marijuana advocates tout the drug and its compounds as therapeutic for everything from treating glaucoma to stopping nightmares. But a new systematic review of more than 10,700 scientific studies conducted by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine found verifiable benefits for only two disorders—chronic pain and the nausea and vomiting caused by chemotherapy.

Despite growing support for legalization efforts, the review found numerous and serious health and social consequences for marijuana use.

This report simply adds to the mountain of evidence that marijuana use is a serious danger to public health and safety, said Scott Chipman, founder of Citizens Against the Legalization of Marijuana.

“The industry has been selling a false narrative that marijuana is not harmful nor addictive,” he told me.

In some cases, the researchers found wide disparities between patient claims and physician-verified benefits. For example, when the committee studied the use of cannabis to treat muscle stiffness and spasms from multiple sclerosis, it found strong support for the drug's effectiveness in studies based on patients' self-reported symptoms. But when the committee considered only studies based on physician reports, the evidence of any benefit nearly disappeared.

Those opposed to the legalization of medical marijuana say such efforts make it much easier to obtain for recreational purposes and for abuse. To test his theory that medical marijuana is distributed arbitrarily, Chipman answered ads in local newspapers targeting people seeking a medical

recommendation for marijuana use. In each case, a receptionist issued a recommendation for him with a doctor's signature preprinted on the document, no medical exam required.

"And the recommendation allows me to buy as much marijuana as I want, in any strength I can get, as often as I want, for as long as I want, with no follow-up visits," Chipman said.

Although the federal research committee found cannabis therapeutically effective for only a small number of medical conditions, it found numerous risks associated with recreational use. Researchers discovered substantial evidence that cannabis use can lead to the development of schizophrenia and other psychoses.

Jody Belsher, a recovery support specialist completing a master's program in addiction studies, knows firsthand the ravages of marijuana abuse. Shortly after her son returned from college, he had a psychotic break and suffered from delusions. She learned he had been using marijuana since age 14, and doctors diagnosed him with cannabis-induced psychosis. Despite several treatment attempts, he continues to use and has become disabled with depression, anxiety, and memory difficulties.

Doctors told Belsher that although her son's continued marijuana use makes his symptoms worse, sobriety won't reverse the damage.

"It's very much like being in a car accident where you have a traumatic brain injury," she said.

According to the study, marijuana use can increase the symptoms of mania in those diagnosed with bipolar disorders and carries a small risk for the development of depressive disorders. The study also showed increased risk of suicide and the development of social anxiety disorder associated with cannabis use. The researchers also discovered moderate evidence that cannabis use impairs learning, memory, and attention disorders.

Currently 28 states and the District of Columbia have legalized cannabis or its components for medical use, and 16 states have laws that allow for a specific type of cannabis extract to be used in the treatment of medical conditions. Recreational use is legal in seven states and the District of Columbia.

Chipman hopes the Trump administration will restore proper attention to drug abuse issues.

"Federal ears over the last eight years appear to have been plugged by pro-pot lobbyists," Chipman said, noting that in 2009 the Obama administration removed the Office of National Drug Control and Policy from the president's Cabinet.

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