

# AMA now recognizes medical marijuana

Contributed by Chris Conrad  
Friday, 04 December 2009

New AMA position calls on DEA to look at rescheduling cannabis

Kris Hermes, Americans for Safe Access

The largest physician-based group in the country, the American Medical Association (AMA), voted Nov. 10 to reverse its long-held position that cannabis has no medical value. The AMA adopted a report drafted by its Council on Science and Public Health (CSAPH) entitled Use of Cannabis for Medicinal Purposes which affirmed the plant's therapeutic benefits and called for further research.

The report concluded that "short-term controlled trials indicate that smoked cannabis reduces neuropathic pain, improves appetite and caloric intake especially in patients with reduced muscle mass, and may relieve spasticity and pain in patients with multiple sclerosis." The report urges that "the Schedule I status of marijuana be reviewed with the goal of facilitating clinical research and development of cannabinoid-based medicines, and alternate delivery methods."

The change of position followed a 2008 resolution by the Medical Student Section of the AMA (SSAMA) in support of reclassifying cannabis out of Schedule I. The past year, the AMA considered three other resolutions on cannabis.

The November vote took place during the organization's annual Interim Meeting of the House of Delegates in Houston, and is a turnaround from the last AMA position, adopted eight years ago, to keep cannabis in Schedule I.

"It's been 72 years since the AMA has officially recognized that marijuana has both already-demonstrated and future-promising medical utility," said Sunil Aggarwal, Ph.D., the medical student who spearheaded passage of the 2008 resolution and one of the CSAPH report's designated expert reviewers.

"The AMA has written an extensive, well documented, evidence-based report that they are seeking to publish in a peer-reviewed journal that will help to educate the medical community about the scientific basis of botanical cannabis-based medicines." Aggarwal is also on the Medical and Scientific Advisory Board of Americans for Safe Access (ASA), the largest US medical marijuana advocacy organization.

In February 2008, a resolution was adopted by the American College of Physicians (ACP), the country's second largest physician group and largest organization of doctors of internal medicine, calling for an "evidence-based review of marijuana's status as a Schedule I controlled substance to determine whether it should be reclassified to a different schedule."

"The two largest physician groups in the US have established medical marijuana as a health care issue that must be addressed," said ASA Government Affairs Director Caren Woodson. "Both organizations have underscored the need for change by placing patients above politics."

The CSAPH report has not officially been released to the public, but AMA documents indicate that it: (1) provides a brief historical perspective on the use of cannabis as medicine; (2) examines the current federal and state-based legal envelope relevant to the medical use of cannabis; (3) provides a brief overview of our current understanding of the pharmacology and physiology of the endocannabinoid system; (4) reviews clinical trials on the relative safety and efficacy of smoked cannabis and botanical-based products; and (5) places this information in perspective with respect to the current drug regulatory framework.

AMA Summary: [AmericansForSafeAccess.org/downloads/AMA\\_Report\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](http://AmericansForSafeAccess.org/downloads/AMA_Report_Executive_Summary.pdf)  
Recommendations of AMA Report: [AmericansForSafeAccess.org/\(downloads/AMA\\_Report\\_Recommendations.pdf](http://AmericansForSafeAccess.org/(downloads/AMA_Report_Recommendations.pdf)  
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