

Medical Marijuana Questions and Answers



May 2015

Does medical research support medical marijuana?

Yes. In 1999, the Congressionally-chartered Institute of Medicine (IOM) issued the most comprehensive study of medical marijuana to date. The report found that the existing data supported the therapeutic value of medical marijuana. After two years of reviewing the scientific data, “the study team found substantial consensus among experts in the relevant disciplines on the scientific evidence about potential medical uses of marijuana.” They concluded that, “nausea, appetite loss, pain and anxiety...all can be mitigated by marijuana.”ⁱ In February 2007, a major study in the journal *Neurology* concluded that AIDS patients suffering from a painful nerve condition in their hands or feet received as much or more relief from smoking marijuana as they would typically get from prescription drugs, though with fewer side effects.ⁱⁱ

Which medical and professional organizations support access to medical marijuana?

New Jersey organizations that have endorsed allowing access to medical marijuana include: the New Jersey Academy of Family Physicians, New Jersey Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, New Jersey State Nurses Association, the New Jersey League for Nursing, American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey, The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society --Southern New Jersey/Shore Region Chapter, The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society--Northern New Jersey Chapter and Faith is Our Pathway

National organizations that support allowing access to medical marijuana include: the American Academy of Family Physicians, American Nurses Association, American Medical Students Association, American Nurses Association, American Public Health Association, American Society of Addiction Medicine, California Nurses Association, Colorado Nurses Association, Connecticut Nurses Association, Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, Lymphoma Foundation of America, Medical Society of the State of New York, Montel William Multiple Sclerosis Foundation, Multiple Sclerosis California Action Network, National Association of People with AIDS, National Nurses Society on Addictions, New England Journal of Medicine, New Mexico Nurses Association, New York State Nurses Association, Virginia Nurses Association.

Do doctors support allowing access to medical marijuana?

Numerous medical and physician organizations, including the Medical Society of the State of New York, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Medical Students Association, and the New England Journal of Medicine support allowing access to marijuana for medical purposes. A 1991 survey of doctors specializing in cancer treatment, published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, found that, of those with an opinion, 54% of the doctors supported access to medical marijuana and 44% had suggested the use of medical marijuana to at least one patient.ⁱⁱⁱ

Does the public support access to medical marijuana?

Yes. A 2006 Polling Company poll found that 86% of New Jerseyans support allowing access to medical marijuana.^{iv} A 2011 Eagleton poll found the same level of support.^v These percentages are similar to support from polls taken nationally and in other states. A 2002 CNN/Time poll found that 80% of Americans support allowing patients to access medical marijuana.^{vi} A Gallup poll conducted in 1999 found 73% support.^{vii}

Do senior citizens support allowing access to medical marijuana?

Yes. Senior citizens are often faced with serious medical conditions. These conditions can turn seniors' golden years into a time of chronic pain and disability. Seniors believe that they and their doctors should have the ability to access whatever medications are best suited to alleviating these debilitating symptoms and improving quality of life. A 2004 poll by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) found that 72% of people over 45 years of age agree that adults should be allowed to legally use marijuana for medical purposes if a physician recommends it.^{viii}

Who can benefit from allowing access to medical marijuana?

Approximately 43,000 New Jerseyans are diagnosed with cancer each year.^{ix} Hundreds of New Jerseyans are diagnosed with multiple sclerosis each year.^x Some 2,500 New Jerseyans are diagnosed with HIV each year.^{xi} More than 32,000 New Jerseyans are living with HIV/AIDS.^{xii} The suffering of these patients, many in the final stages of their lives, is devastating for them and their families.

For some of these patients, currently available medications are ineffective in treating terrible symptoms like pain, muscle spasms, nausea, loss of appetite, and wasting. Medical marijuana may provide these patients with relief. In consultation with a doctor, and with a doctor's recommendation, these patients could get relief by having access to medical marijuana.

Not all eligible patients will elect to use medical marijuana, but it is important that the option be available. Compassion and common sense dictate that New Jersey allow these patients access to whatever medication is effective in relieving their suffering and improving their quality of life.

Which states allow access to medical marijuana?

Twenty-three states and the District of Columbia currently allow patients legal access to medical marijuana: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington State.

Does allowing medical use of marijuana increase overall marijuana use?

No. According to the Congressionally-chartered Institute of Medicine's 1999 report, "[T]here is broad social concern that sanctioning the medical use of marijuana might increase its use among the general population. At this point there are no convincing data to support this concern. The existing data are consistent with the idea that this would not be a problem if the medical use of marijuana were as closely regulated as other medications with abuse potential...No evidence suggests that the use of opiates or cocaine for medical purposes has increased the perception that their illicit use is safe or acceptable."^{xiii}

Does allowing access to medical marijuana send the wrong message to our children?

No. In states that allow medical marijuana, recreational use among youth has not increased. In fact, according to the California Student Survey, life-time use among 11th graders decreased 17%, use among 9th graders decreased 35%, and use among 7th graders decreased 24% since the passage of medical marijuana legislation in California in 1996. Similar decreases were found in other states that allow access to marijuana for medical use.^{xiv} In 1998, the State of California commissioned a study examining the effects of its medical marijuana law and found no evidence of increased marijuana use.^{xv}

How does New Jersey's law work?

In 2010, New Jersey enacted the *Compassionate Use Medical Marijuana Act*, which allows qualified patients suffering from certain serious illnesses to access medical marijuana with a doctor's recommendation. The New Jersey Department of Health oversees the program. Upon approval by the department, a qualified patient receives a registry identification card. The patient can then access up to two ounces of medical marijuana a month at a state Alternative Treatment Center. For more information about New Jersey's Medical Marijuana Program visit the program website at: <http://www.state.nj.us/health/medicalmarijuana/>.

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- ⁱ Janet E. Joy, Stanley J. Watson, Jr., and John A. Benson, Jr. *Marijuana and Medicine: Assessing the Science Base*, Division of Neuroscience and Behavioral Research, Institute of Medicine (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999).
- ⁱⁱ D.I. Abrams, MD; C.A. Jay, MD; S.B. Shade, MPH; H. Vizoso, RN; H. Reda, BA; S. Press, BS; M.E. Kelly, MPH; M.C. Rowbotham, MD; and K.L. Petersen, MD. "Cannabis in painful HIV-associated sensory neuropathy: A randomized placebo-controlled trial." *Journal of Neurology*. February 2007. AAN Enterprises, Inc,
- ⁱⁱⁱ Doblin, Richard and Kleiman, Mark A. R, "Marijuana as Antiemetic Medicine: A Survey of Oncologists' Experiences and Attitudes." *Journal of Clinical Oncology*. 1991; 9(7): pp. 1314-1319.
- ^{iv} *Medical Marijuana Statewide Survey of 700 Registered Voters in New Jersey*, The Polling Company, Inc., June 2006.
- ^v *Eagleton Institute of Politics Center for Public Interest Polling*, May 2002.
- ^{vi} CNN/Time poll conducted by Harris vi October, 2002.
- ^{vii} The Gallup Organization, April 1999.
- ^{viii} AARP the Magazine, *Medical Uses of Marijuana: Opinions of U.S. Residents 45+*, December 2004.
- ^{ix} American Cancer Society *Facts and Figures*, 2003.
- ^x National MS Society, *Just the Facts: 2005-2006* available at <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Brochures-Just%20the.asp>
- ^{xi} New Jersey HIV/AIDS Report, December 31, 2004 available at <http://www.state.nj.us/health/aids/qtr1204.pdf>.
- ^{xii} *Id.*
- ^{xiii} Janet E. Joy, Stanley J. Watson, Jr., and John A. Benson, Jr. *Marijuana and Medicine: Assessing the Science Base*, Division of Neuroscience and Behavioral Research, Institute of Medicine (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999).
- ^{xiv} California Student Survey available at <http://www.safestate.org/documents/final-css03tables.pdf>; Karen O'Keefe and Mitch Earleywine, *Marijuana Use by Young People: The Impact of State Medical Marijuana Laws* (Washington, DC, Marijuana Policy Project).
- ^{xv} Skager, Rodney, Greg Austin, and Mamie M. Wong, *Marijuana Use and the Response to Proposition 215 Among California Youth, a Special Study From the California Student Substance Use Survey (Grades 7, 9, and 11)* 1197-98.