



Ensuring fair access to medical cannabis for patients in Europe

About Cannabis Europe

Cannabis Europe is an advocacy group composed of scientific organisations, academia, patients organisations, NGOs and industry, which aims to ensure patient access to high quality, safe, cannabis-derived medicines and to demonstrate their benefits for patients to European policy-makers.

About medical cannabis

Cannabis-derived medicines are recognised for their therapeutic effects. Firstly, they can contribute positively in the treatment of a wide range of diseases and disorders as multiple sclerosis (MS), seizures, HIV/AIDS, and mental disorders, amongst others, with their associated symptoms (including pain). Secondly, they are instrumental in relieving patients from the pain which can be induced by some of the treatment methods for various diseases including cancers. Yet, despite growing awareness and interest in medical cannabis within patient and medical communities, the regulatory framework for medical cannabis across the European Union remains fragmented. As a result of this lack of harmonisation, European patients suffer from serious difficulty in accessing high-quality cannabis-derived medicines.

Cannabis Europe aims to provide European patients with safe access to high-quality cannabis-derived medicines.

Cannabis Europe calls for:

1. **A clear definition of and a harmonised European regulatory framework for medical cannabis.**
2. A solid **research and innovation budget** (under Horizon Europe) with a view to enhancing knowledge on medical cannabis, ensuring correct societal perception of medical cannabis while developing potential future applications for cannabis derived medicines.

From a fragmented regulatory landscape towards a European approach to medical cannabis

At present, the regulatory framework for medical cannabis remains fragmented across the European Union (EU). For example, Member States enforce different rules for the maximum permitted levels of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and Cannabidiol (CBD)¹ in cannabis-derived medicines. In addition there are differences in approach between Member States regarding production, licensing, distribution and reimbursement of patient costs for medical cannabis.

This lack of harmonisation is detrimental to European patients as it hampers their access to affordable high-quality medicines.

Over the course of the first Parliamentary session of 2019, the European Parliament will debate a motion for a resolution on the use of cannabis for medical purposes². The motion, which was tabled by the European Parliament Environment and Public Safety (ENVI) Committee, calls on the European Commission and the European national authorities to work together to provide a legal definition of medical cannabis. The motion also urges for a clear distinction to be drawn between (1) cannabis-derived medicines approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) or other regulatory agencies, (2) medical use of cannabis not supported by clinical trials, and (3) other applications of cannabis.

Cannabis Europe welcomes the motion for a resolution and thanks the Members of the European Parliament who initiated this process. It is now crucial that the European Commission and Member States work towards the completion of such a definition as the first step towards providing patients with a harmonized, European regulatory framework on medical cannabis.

R&I: towards a solid budget for research on medical cannabis

In 2019, the European institutions³ are aiming at delivering the largest, European funded research and innovation programme, called Horizon Europe. Currently provisioned with a €100bn budget, the programme is projected to allocate €52.7 bn to address societal and industrial challenges, including health-related issues. In addition, the motion for a resolution of the European Parliament calls on Member States and the European Commission to address not only priority research topics on cannabis but also consider the allocation of funds under Horizon Europe.

Considering that research on medical cannabis has been largely underfunded at national level and absent at European level, Horizon Europe provides the opportunity to assess the allocation of a specific budget for enhancing our knowledge on medical cannabis and ultimately develop safe and sound medical solutions for European patients.

Such research could explore the use of THC, CBD and other cannabinoids for medical treatments including an evaluation of their effects on the human body. Ultimately, Horizon

¹ THC constitutes the main psychoactive and addictive constituent of cannabis while CBD has no intoxicating or addictive properties.

² 2018/2775(RSP)

³ European Commission, European Parliament, and the Council of the European Union (comprising Member States).

Europe could be instrumental in assessing the medical benefits of the cannabis-derived medicines which some patients already rely upon.

In addition, research needs to fill the gaps in scientific communication, reaching out to the medical and patient communities, as well as society at large. This is crucial to ensure all stakeholders are aware of the latest scientific knowledge and research outcomes and is also an important way to dismantle societal misperceptions and deep-rooted negative attitudes towards cannabis-based medicines.

Call to actions

Currently, the regulatory framework around cannabis use in medical applications is fragmented across European Member States, leading to a lack of harmonisation in patients' access to medical cannabis. Furthermore, research on the benefits of medical cannabis in treating diseases or symptoms of illness remains limited in scope and requires the allocation of dedicated funds to increase our knowledge and provide patients with safe and sound cannabis-derived medicines.

Cannabis Europe calls on the European institutions:

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