

House Veterans Affairs Committee
Health Subcommittee
Legislative Hearing
April 30, 2019
Congressman J. Luis Correa (CA-46)

Chairwoman Brownley and Ranking Member Dunn, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today. I appreciate the opportunity to testify about my bipartisan legislation, H.R. 712, the “VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act.”

As you know, veterans experience physical and psychological injuries at higher rates than their civilian counterparts as a result of their military service to our country. Unfortunately, the current clinical treatment of prescription opioids to address post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and chronic pain have at times been ineffective or at worst had dangerous results such as addiction or death. In response to the opioids crisis, Congress, the VA, and veterans service organizations nationwide correctly focused their attention on reducing opioids addiction and overdoses. As twenty veterans tragically die from suicide each day, we, as policymakers, should consider alternatives to the treatment of PTSD and chronic pain.

One alternative treatment that has been discussed by veterans that I have met in my congressional district and cited by nationwide surveys commissioned by the American Legion and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (I-A-V-A) is the therapeutic benefits of medical cannabis to manage chronic pain and other health ailments. According to the Legion, 92 percent of veteran households surveyed supported medical cannabis research while an estimated twenty-two percent of veterans reported the use of medical cannabis to treat a mental or physical condition. Similarly, the I-A-V-A survey demonstrated that over 80 percent of their membership supported the legalization of medical cannabis.

Therefore, with my colleague and friend Congressman Clay Higgins, I introduced the bipartisan VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act to promote understanding of the safety and effectiveness of medical cannabis use by veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and chronic pain. This bill requires VA to

conduct a double-blind clinical trial on the impact of different forms and delivery methods of cannabis on specific health conditions of eligible veterans with PTSD and chronic pain.

With twenty-two percent of veterans currently using cannabis for medicinal purposes, it is important that doctors be able to fully advise veterans on the potential impacts and benefits of medical cannabis use on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and chronic pain. Research into medical cannabis is necessary and supported by the veteran community.

I want to thank Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, and the many other veterans and medical groups for their support of the bill.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify about H.R. 712, the VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act. This legislation is a pragmatic and sensible approach for research on medical cannabis that will hopefully result in safe, alternative treatments for our veterans and reduce the number of veterans suicides.

We owe this to our veterans who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for our nation's freedom. I look forward to working with you all to move this bill forward and am happy to answer any questions you may have.