



VETERANS CANNABIS COALITION
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STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
OF
THE VETERANS CANNABIS COALITION
FOR THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH

APRIL 17, 2017

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Brownley, Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the Veterans Cannabis Coalition (VCC), we thank you for the invitation to submit our remarks to authorize the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to conduct and support research of medicinal cannabis. We believe that the *VA Medicinal Cannabis Act of 2018* is a positive first step toward putting the incredible research capacity of the Department of Veteran Affairs to work investigating the medical value of cannabis.

The Veterans Cannabis Coalition appreciates the Committee for having listened to the concerns of millions of veterans and identified the immediate need for more high-quality research into the efficacy of cannabis through the Department of Veteran Affairs. The untold number of veterans, whom are suffering from a lack of effective treatments for their service-connected injuries, need options. Based on current and existing research and anecdotal testimonies, we recognize the immense potential of cannabis to treat some of the most persistent health issues facing veterans today, particularly traumatic brain injury (TBI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and the pernicious effect of chronic pain.

The comorbidity of these conditions in many veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan over the last 17 years has led to a modality within the Veterans Health Administration to focus on pharmacology. Doctors throughout the VA health system have consistently prescribed risky combinations of incredibly powerful drugs in order to manage the symptoms of the veterans under their care. These drugs include opioids, benzodiazepines, stimulants, sedatives, anti-depressants, anti-psychotics, and more, and are often taken in conjunction.

Veterans report that this commonly prescribed drug regimen, nicknamed the 'combat cocktail', negatively impacts their interpersonal relationships and employment, destroys their quality of life, and has led many to unsuccessfully attempting to take their own life while under the influence of the very same medications prescribed by the VA. There are thousands of others, driven by desperation and unable to find relief through the only treatments offered, who were successful. The veteran suicide and overdose rates reflect this reality.

As Congress and the public have begun to grapple with the fact that millions of Americans—from valedictorians to professional athletes to service members—struggle with opioid use disorders, the reaction from health systems has been to taper or cut opioid prescriptions for patients. The VA has touted their reduction and shift toward other therapies and holistic treatments like acupuncture and yoga. Scaling such therapies, however, presents massive challenges, while using non-narcotic medications like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) carries other long-term risks such as kidney damage. Cannabis has no known toxicity, low rates of misuse and abuse, and its use as a medication is associated with marked improvements in dozens of different conditions, ranging from insomnia to anxiety, PTSD to pain management.

The Veterans Cannabis Coalition recognizes the *VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2018* as an opportunity for Congress to decidedly address this crisis. Establishing the medical merit of cannabis through Department of Veterans Affairs guided and funded research will provide immeasurable public good, one that we hope both parties will fully support. We look forward to working with your offices and Committee staff as we aim to educate and build support for this effort in the weeks and months ahead.

For additional information, please contact Eric Goepel, Founder & CEO of the Veterans Cannabis Coalition at (213) 986-8139 or eric@veteranscannacoalition.org.