

# New HHS Report Advocates Easier Cannabis Research Process

## HHS Completes Overdue Report on Cannabis Research Barriers

The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has finally completed its long-awaited report on the barriers to cannabis research, six months past its original deadline. This report, mandated by President Biden's Medical Cannabis and Cannabidiol Research Expansion Act signed in 2022, was initially due in December 2023. The findings and recommendations in the report could have significant implications for the future of cannabis research in the United States.

### Key Findings

The HHS report identifies three primary obstacles that have hindered wider cannabis research:

#### DEA Registration

The process for researchers to register with the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) is described as lengthy and complex, varying significantly by state. This bureaucratic hurdle has been a significant barrier for many researchers looking to study cannabis.

#### Dispensary Approval

Another major obstacle is the requirement for DEA pre-approval of cannabis dispensaries for research purposes. Despite this requirement, no dispensaries have yet been approved. As a result, researchers often have to rely on participant reporting or product photos to gather necessary data, which can compromise the accuracy and reliability of their research.

#### Hemp Product Inconsistencies

The report also highlights legal inconsistencies around hemp products, which have led to an overly cautious approach within the research community. This inconsistency creates confusion and additional hurdles for researchers trying to navigate the legal landscape of cannabis and hemp research.

### Recommendations

To address these barriers, the HHS report includes several recommendations:

#### Enact the 'HALT Fentanyl Act'

One of the key recommendations is the enactment of the 'HALT Fentanyl Act.' This legislation would allow research on all Schedule I substances, potentially simplifying the process for researchers to study cannabis.

## **Fully Implement the 2022 Medical Cannabis and Cannabidiol Research Expansion Act**

The report also calls for the full implementation of the Medical Cannabis and Cannabidiol Research Expansion Act of 2022. This would streamline the application process for researchers, making it easier to obtain the necessary approvals to conduct their studies.

## **Legislative Response**

Earl Blumenauer, co-chair of the Congressional Cannabis Caucus, has welcomed the findings of the HHS report and is urging swift action from the Biden-Harris Administration. He emphasizes the importance of completing the scheduling review and enabling research on dispensary-grade cannabis. According to Blumenauer, these steps are crucial as the country moves toward potential cannabis legalization.

“We must ensure that our policies reflect the current realities of cannabis use and the growing body of evidence supporting its medical benefits,” Blumenauer stated. “The findings of this report are a critical step toward making cannabis research more accessible and comprehensive. It is now up to the administration and Congress to act on these recommendations.”

## **The Importance of Research Access**

The HHS report underscores the importance of making cannabis research more accessible to understand better the medical and therapeutic benefits of the plant. With increasing interest in the potential health benefits of cannabis, particularly in treating conditions such as chronic pain, epilepsy, and PTSD, the need for robust and comprehensive research has never been greater.

## **Challenges in Current Research**

Researchers currently face significant challenges due to the stringent regulations and legal ambiguities surrounding cannabis. The lengthy DEA registration process and the lack of approved dispensaries for research purposes severely limit the scope and reliability of cannabis studies. Moreover, the inconsistencies in legal interpretations of hemp products further complicate the research landscape.

## **Potential Impact of Recommendations**

If the recommendations of the HHS report are implemented, they could lead to a significant expansion of cannabis research in the United States. Simplifying the registration process and allowing research on all Schedule I substances would remove some of the most significant barriers currently facing researchers. Additionally, fully implementing the Medical Cannabis and Cannabidiol Research Expansion Act would provide a clearer framework for researchers, facilitating more rigorous and comprehensive studies.

## **Future Prospects**

The completion of the HHS report and its recommendations comes at a crucial time as the United States continues to grapple with the complexities of cannabis legalization. With a growing number of states legalizing cannabis for medical and recreational use, there is a pressing need for federal policies that support comprehensive research into the plant's effects and potential benefits.

The HHS's overdue report on cannabis research barriers provides a detailed analysis of the challenges facing researchers and offers practical recommendations for overcoming these obstacles. As the country moves closer to potential cannabis legalization, it is imperative that federal and state policies evolve to support the necessary research infrastructure. The findings of this report should serve as a catalyst for legislative and administrative action, ensuring that the future of cannabis research in the United States is both robust and accessible.

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