

Ukraine Legalizes Medical Cannabis Amid Ongoing Conflict

Medical Marijuana Legalization Takes Effect in Ukraine

As of Friday, medical cannabis legalization has officially taken effect in Ukraine, marking a significant shift in the nation's approach to cannabis policy. This change comes approximately six months after President Volodymyr Zelensky signed the medical cannabis legislation into law. The policy is being implemented with the hope that access to medical cannabis will aid soldiers in coping with the physical and mental injuries sustained during Ukraine's ongoing war with Russia.

Cannabis Removed from List of Dangerous Substances

The Ministry of Health announced that cannabis, along with its resin, extracts, and tinctures, has been removed from the list of particularly dangerous substances. "Previously, their circulation was prohibited—now it is allowed, but with certain restrictions," the Ministry stated. The policy aims to ensure that medical cannabis is cultivated under strict regulations, with licensing conditions developed for review by the Cabinet of Ministers. The entire supply chain, from importation or cultivation to patient dispensing in pharmacies, will be tightly controlled through licensing.

Legislation Focuses Solely on Medical Use

The Ministry of Health emphasized that the law pertains exclusively to the medical use of cannabis-based drugs, not recreational use. "This is a significant step forward in providing care to patients who need specific treatment," the Ministry noted in a Facebook post. As part of the implementation process, Ukraine has begun importing marijuana products, which became possible after cannabis was reclassified from List I to List II in the country's drug code. This reclassification allows for medical use with a prescription.

Challenges and Opposition to the Legislation

The path to legalization was not without obstacles. Although lawmakers approved the medical cannabis legislation last December, the opposition Batkivshchyna party attempted to block its progress by forcing a vote on a resolution to repeal the measure. This resolution was defeated in January, clearing the way for the bill to be enacted. Previously, opponents of the legislation tried to stall the process by filing numerous "spam" amendments, but these efforts also failed, and the bill eventually passed with 248 votes.

Cannabis for War-Related Conditions

The law primarily legalizes medical cannabis for patients suffering from severe illnesses and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related to the ongoing conflict with Russia. While the initial text of the legislation specifically mentions cancer and war-induced PTSD as qualifying conditions, there is ongoing discussion

about expanding the list of approved conditions. Lawmakers have received numerous appeals from patients with other illnesses such as Alzheimer's disease and epilepsy.

Regulatory Responsibilities and Future Steps

The Agrarian Policy Ministry has been tasked with overseeing cannabis cultivation and processing operations. In addition, the National Police and the State Agency on Medicines will be responsible for the oversight and enforcement of regulations concerning the distribution of medical cannabis. Deputy Prime Minister Olha Stefanishyna, who is also a member of the legislature's National Health, Medical Care, and Medical Insurance Committee, stated that the list of approved medical conditions for cannabis use would be published soon, with efforts underway to expand it to include more conditions, similar to practices in countries like Germany.

Zelensky's Support for Medical Cannabis

President Zelensky has been a vocal supporter of medical marijuana legalization. In a parliamentary address last June, he stressed the importance of adopting the world's best practices to alleviate the pain, stress, and trauma experienced by Ukrainian citizens, particularly those affected by the war. "We must finally fairly legalize cannabis-based medicines for all those who need them, with appropriate scientific research and controlled Ukrainian production," he declared.

Zelensky's support for medical marijuana dates back to his presidential campaign in 2019, where he expressed that it would be "normal" for people to have access to cannabis "droplets," likely referring to marijuana tinctures. This policy change sets Ukraine apart from its aggressor, Russia, which has maintained a strict anti-cannabis stance on the international stage, even condemning countries like Canada for nationwide marijuana legalization.

Ukraine's Progress in Medical Cannabis Legislation

The implementation of medical marijuana legalization in Ukraine is a landmark moment for the country, reflecting a commitment to improving the quality of life for its citizens, especially those impacted by the ongoing conflict. As Ukraine continues to navigate its complex relationship with cannabis, this policy change represents a significant step forward in modernizing its healthcare system and addressing the needs of its patients.

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