

Why Schedule III May Not Be Enough to Advance U.S. Cannabis Research

Schedule III May Expand Cannabis Research Access—but Structural Barriers Remain

While the move to place marijuana under **Schedule III** is widely viewed as a step forward for cannabis research, experts warn that the change may fall short of unlocking meaningful progress—particularly as funding constraints and political pressure continue to shape the academic landscape.

One immediate benefit of rescheduling is that **international cannabis research can now be formally considered by U.S. scientists and regulators**. Studies conducted abroad, once largely sidelined, may now influence both federal policy discussions and regulatory decision-making.

This shift could be significant. Companies such as **Curaleaf** have invested heavily in overseas research, including large-scale studies and planned clinical trials in the **United Kingdom**. Data generated from these efforts may soon be eligible for review by U.S. agencies—an outcome that was previously constrained by marijuana’s Schedule I status.

Academic Hesitation and Shrinking Research Budgets

Despite these regulatory openings, many U.S. university researchers are likely to remain cautious. Institutional resistance—often driven by risk-averse legal departments or senior administrators opposed to cannabis research—continues to limit participation. In some cases, deans or provosts remain reluctant to authorize projects tied to marijuana, regardless of federal scheduling changes.

Funding pressures compound the issue. Federal research grants have been sharply reduced, leaving cannabis science competing for fewer resources. The Trump administration, supported by cost-cutting efforts tied to **Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency**, has significantly scaled back government-funded research programs. As a result, even researchers willing to engage may lack the financial backing to do so.

Experts Question Long-Term Impact

These challenges have led some academics to doubt whether Schedule III will meaningfully advance cannabis research in the United States.

“I don’t have a great deal of confidence that this will ultimately lead to major change,” said **Josh Meisel**, a professor of sociology and co-founder of the **Humboldt Institute for Interdisciplinary Marijuana Research at Cal Poly Humboldt**.

According to Meisel and others, regulatory ambiguity—combined with political volatility—creates an environment where universities may continue to avoid cannabis-related work unless Congress provides explicit authorization.

Political Pressure Increases Institutional Risk Aversion

Universities are also responding to broader political signals. The administration's willingness to revoke—or threaten to revoke—billions of dollars in federal funding over campus protests or perceived policy violations has heightened institutional sensitivity to risk.

In this climate, universities may adopt a posture similar to that of financial institutions during prohibition-era cannabis banking debates: avoiding involvement entirely unless federal law offers unmistakable clarity and protection.

Risk Management Takeaway

Although Schedule III removes some regulatory obstacles, **it does not resolve the deeper structural and financial barriers limiting U.S. cannabis research.** International studies may gain new relevance, but domestic academic participation could remain constrained by funding shortages, political pressure, and institutional caution.

For policymakers, researchers, and industry stakeholders, the key takeaway is clear: **rescheduling alone may not be sufficient.** Without stable funding mechanisms and explicit congressional guidance, cannabis research in the United States may continue to lag—despite regulatory progress on paper.

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