



Americans for Safe Access

Activist Newsletter

Defending Patients' Access to Medical Marijuana

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Annual Unity Conference Energizes Advocates in DC

ASA's National Medical Cannabis Unity Conference brought over 200 patients, doctors, and advocates to Washington, DC in March. The fourth annual conference featured three days of talks, trainings and networking, followed by a lobby day that saw advocates hold more than 300 meetings on Capitol Hill with their elected representatives and staffs.

The conference began with a keynote address from a leading authority in the field of cannabis research, Dr. Lumir Ondřej Hanuš. Dr. Hanuš, the Czech chemist who with William Devane first identified a key element of the endogenous cannabinoid system. He also received ASA's Lifetime Achievement award.



Conference panels examined a host of issues affecting patients, including what happens when medical cannabis is rescheduled, how regulations are being implemented internationally, methods for creating cannabis extracts and their uses, and the latest developments in medical research and quality assurance standards. Tools for improving advocacy

skills were the focus of several panels and workshops, and medical professionals earned CME credits in a course covering Cannabis Care Certification, the endocannabinoid system and cannabinoids in pain management.

The day after the conference, ASA held a press conference in front of the Capitol with Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (pictured at right) and others to urge passage of the bi-partisan CARERS Act before advocates fanned out across the Hill to lobby their Senators and Representatives.



ASA Celebrates 14th Anniversary


Americans for Safe Access is marking its 14th anniversary with a push to change international drug policy at the United Nations and to pass comprehensive federal legislation.

Founded as a response to the Bush administration's raids on medical cannabis providers in California, ASA began as a coalition of drug policy and HIV/AIDS organizations with a campaign targeting Asa Hutchinson, then head of the Drug Enforcement Administration. National organizing soon led to coordinated protests in 55 cities demanding the DEA "Cease and Desist." The California Campaign

for Safe Access was launched that year to implement the state's voter initiative, "raid-preparedness" trainings for medical cannabis providers were held nationally, and the Patients Rights' Project was created to educate and defend patients. ASA organizing and legal work helped protect patients in California from illegal confiscation of medicine, secured the right to have medicine returned, and established criminal protection for providers. ASA has now trained tens of thousands of Americans nationwide on their rights and how to handle law enforcement encounters.

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PENNSYLVANIA BILL SIGNED BY GOVERNOR

 On Sunday, April 17, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf signed SB 3 in a ceremony with patients and advocates, making Pennsylvania the 24th state with a robust medical cannabis program.

His signature marked the end of a multi-year political struggle that saw bills pass the state Senate by overwhelming margins only to die in the House. This year, another strong Senate bill went to the House early in the session, only to languish before being returned in March transformed by amendments that sharply limited the program. Senate sponsors took the risk of re-amending the legislation to make it more workable and sent it back to the House, where the new version passed.

Among the House changes that survived is a requirement that doctors who wish to recommend cannabis will be required to register with the state in advance and complete a four-hour training. Patients with serious medical conditions may qualify to obtain up to a 30-day supply of limited types of cannabis products, such as oils, pills and topical lotions. The state will collect a 5% excise tax.

The law will take effect next month, though state officials say it may be as much as two years before any medicine is distributed to patients. For now, the law includes a two-year 'safe harbor' provision that protects parents of minor children who can lawfully obtain medical cannabis for those children outside Pennsylvania.

UN Hears Calls for Reform from Patients

The United Nation's General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drug policy ended yesterday, April 21, with representatives and world leaders making strong statements urging member countries to move beyond prohibition and into effective regulations for cannabis. The session opened with a discussion of the conflict between medical cannabis laws and the UN treaties prohibiting marijuana, with the UNGASS president noting "access to drugs for medical use is a human right to protect."



Mexico's President Enrique Peña Nieto and the World Health Organization's Director General Dr. Margaret Chan were among the leaders who spoke out for allowing medical use.

To help educate UN member states, ASA and IMCPC created a one-page document, Moving Global Cannabis Policy Forward, that ties cannabis to the UN's priorities, explaining why "cannabis must be rescheduled in order to meet the objective of ensuring the availability of

and access to controlled substances exclusively for medical and scientific purposes."

ASA also distributed to UNGASS its report, Cannabis and Cannabis Resin: Critical Review Preparation Document. That 94-page document by more than a dozen expert authors was refined and peer-reviewed by more than 200 patients, doctors and advocates as part of ASA's 2016 Unity Conference.

Lawmakers in Three States Modify Their Medical Cannabis Programs

Lawmakers and regulators in three states acted last month to expand or implement their state's medical cannabis program. In **Virginia**, SB701, a bill that will allow for the production and distribution of limited cannabis extracts, cleared both houses of the state legislature on unanimous votes and was signed by Gov. Terry McAuliffe on March 29. The new law allows the Board of Pharmacy to issue production regulations this year, but the law does not go into effect unless it is reenacted by the Virginia leg-

islature in 2017. Last year's passage of SB1235 and HB1445 gave epilepsy patients an affirmative defense for possession of cannabis extracts containing cannabidiol (CBD) and THCa, but that law provided no legal way for anyone to produce the oils or for patients to obtain them.

In **Connecticut**, state officials expanded their medical cannabis program to protect more patients. Regulators added six conditions to the list for which doctors may recommend

medical cannabis, including ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), ulcerative colitis, sickle cell disease, and three pain conditions.

In **Florida**, Gov. Rick Scott signed House Bill 307 to allow terminally ill patients to use medical cannabis now. The bill expands the state's 'Right to Try Act' that permits use of non-FDA approved medicines by the dying. The bill also attempts to resolve implementation problems with the state's 2014 medical cannabis law that has yet to make any medicine available to Floridians. In November, the state's voters will again get a chance to pass a constitutional amendment that would institute a robust medical cannabis program. A similar voter initiative fell just short in 2014 of the needed super-majority of 60 percent.

Senate Panel OKs Two Cannabis Amendments



In a sign of growing support in Congress, the Senate Appropriations Committee has approved two medical cannabis measures in recent weeks. Both actions were budget amendments that provide policy direction, one that broadens safe access for veterans and one that would continue the ban on interference with state laws.

The first to pass would allow Veterans Health Administration physicians to provide the documentation veterans need to participate in state medical cannabis programs. The right of doctors to recommend cannabis is protected by the First Amendment, but federal policy explicit forbids VA physicians from doing so. The bipartisan Veterans Equal Access Amendment (VEAA) blocks the VA from spending money on enforcing that policy. Reintroduced by Steve Daines (R-MT) and Jeff Merkley (D-OR), it passed on a vote of 20-10.

This week, the committee also acted on a vote of 21-8 to extend the restrictions placed on the Department of Justice (DOJ) by an historic

budget amendment last year. Again sponsored by Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), the Senate amendment to the FY2017 Commerce, Justice, Science & Related Agencies Appropriations Act (CJS) prohibits the DOJ from spending funds to interfere with state medical cannabis laws. Known as the Rohrabacher-Farr Amendment after its House sponsors Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) and Sam Farr (D-CA), the measure has been part of the previous two CJS budget bills. The House has not had a budget vote this year, but since the amendment was in last year's appropriations bill, the provision will likely remain in effect if this year's budget is again set by a continuing resolution.

The DOJ had argued the Rohrabacher-Farr Amendment only prevented it from challenging state laws, but U.S. District Judge Charles Breyer ruled otherwise last October, ending a federal injunction that had prevented a California dispensary from distributing medical cannabis. Last week the DOJ conceded and abandoned its appeal of his ruling, which has implications for other federal cases.

ANNIVERSARY, continued from page 1

By 2006, ASA had over 20,000 members and a national office in Washington, D.C. to lobby on Capitol Hill. In 2010, ASA's Executive Director hosted a series of national strategy meetings with patients and other stakeholders to identify needs and craft proposals. The result was a citizen-advocate's guide for developing policies and the online Advocates Training Center.

In 2013, ASA launched the Peace For Patient Campaign and published "What's the Cost," a report on the fiscal impact of the federal war on medical cannabis. In each of the past two years, ASA has produced "Medical Marijuana Access in the US," a report analyzing each state law from a patient's perspective. Over the past 14 years, ASA has distributed more than one million pieces of educational literature and helped bring thousands of citizens face-to-face with lawmakers at all levels of government to talk about medical cannabis.

ASA has also worked directly with lawmakers to adopt and improve medical cannabis legislation, resulting in new laws such as California's measure to prevent medical cannabis patients from being denied organ transplants and the Rohrabacher-Farr Amendment to prevent federal interference.

ASA's coalition has now expanded to include powerful new allies such as the American Herbal Products Association (AHPA) and the United Food and Commercial Workers Union. ASA collaborated with AHPA on their Recommendations for Regulators and with the American Herbal Pharmacopeia in producing a Cannabis Monograph, the definitive account of the plant's botany and medical uses.

Today, ASA is helping educate physicians in a partnership with the Answer Page, training regulators and certifying cannabis businesses through the Patient Focused Certification program, and working with an international coalition to reform global policy. With the support of more than 50,000 members, ASA is making a difference for patients everywhere.

ANNIVERSARY OFFER: Half Price for Unity 2017

In celebration of ASA turning 14 years old this week, you can **register for UNITY 2017 at a discount of 50% off!** ASA's annual national conference and lobby day will be from April 7-11, 2017 at the Lowes Madison hotel in Washington, D.C. Make your plans now to join the world's leading experts and advocates for an informative and fun event. This offer is only good until the end of April, so act today to get your spot at the table.

www.nationalmedicalcannabisunityconference.org/unity_2017_registration

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