



## International Patient Coalition Seeks UN Action Advocates from 27 Countries Address World Health Organization

On November 16, ASA Executive Director Steph Sherer joined patient advocates representing 27 countries who travelled to Geneva to address the World Health Organization (WHO).

They urged the WHO's Expert Committee on Drug Dependence to reshape policies that affect the health and safety of millions of patients using cannabis and cannabis products worldwide. That committee is an important

advisor to the United Nation's Commission on Narcotic Drugs, which sets international drug policies. The United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS 2016) is set for April 2016 in New York.

"The current international policies on cannabis are outdated and are having a detrimental impact on patients in the United States and worldwide," says ASA's Sherer, ASA executive director and a representative of the International Medical Cannabis Patients Coalition. "New policies should take into



IMCPC Representatives in Prague

account new clinical research, product safety protocols and global patient needs."

UNGASS 2016 was scheduled in September 2012 at the request of the presidents of Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico, co-sponsored by 95 other countries. The special session will include a review of the treaties that drive international drug policy: the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971, and the United Nations Convention

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## Senate Votes to Let VA Doctors Recommend

The Department of Veterans Affairs may be forced to end its ban on their doctors providing the recommendations veterans need to participate in state medical cannabis programs. The day before Veterans Day, the Senate modified the VA budget to allow it.

The Daines/Merkley amendment to the FY2016 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill passed the Senate Appropriations Committee in May before moving to the Senate floor. The House narrowly rejected a similar measure in the spring, so the fate of the amendment hinges on how lawmakers reconcile the two versions of the VA budget bill.

The amendment would prevent the Justice Department from spending funds to restrict doctors or penalize veterans who use medical cannabis in states that allow it.

## New York Enacts Emergency Measure

Governor Andrew Cuomo bowed to pressure in early November and signed an emergency measure designed to speed up the roll out of New York's medical cannabis program. The move came less than two months before New York's Compassionate Care Act of 2014 is scheduled to go into full effect.

Patient advocates and state lawmakers have been concerned by setbacks in the program's implementation, prompting the leg-

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## Advocates Demand Obama Fire DEA Chief

Pressure is mounting on DEA Acting Administrator Chuck Rosenberg. On November 20, medical cannabis advocates delivered a petition with more than 100,000 signatures calling for his ouster. The petition was started a mere two weeks earlier, after the former prosecutor publicly called medical cannabis "a joke."

The petition was organized by Tom Angell of Marijuana Majority, whose mother is a patient, and was supported by Americans

for Safe Access and other advocacy groups. Angell and other advocates held a press conference in front of DEA headquarters in Arlington, Virginia as they delivered the boxes of signatures.

Medical cannabis patients of all ages were present to deliver the petition, along with parents who testified to its life-saving properties for their children with intractable seizure disorders and veterans who rely on it to stave off

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## Pennsylvania Rally Urges Lawmakers to Act

Medical cannabis advocates rallied in Pennsylvania on December 5 to urge state lawmakers to take immediate action on a bill that has been stalled in the House. The state Senate passed a medical cannabis bill in May. The House Rules Committee voted to put the measure to a vote in mid-November, but the bill has been saddled with more than 100 restrictive amendments.

Among them is a limit of 10% on THC content and a provision that would end the program after two years though it will take 18 months to get started. Another amendment would create an advisory board for regulating the program that would include the state police commissioner and the presidents of the District Attorneys Association and the State Police Chiefs Association, who have publicly opposed the program, but only one patient.

## Florida Selects Five Nurseries to Cultivate

Florida state officials announced the five companies that will be licensed to produce medical cannabis for the CBD extracts that will be the only legally available products. The CBD extracts are supposed to be available to patients with seizure disorders and cancer by June 2016. The five cultivators were selected from 28 applicants by a panel of three state reviewers, based on rules set by a panel that

included representatives from five commercial nurseries.

The 2014 law originally established a lottery system, but that was changed in response to lobbying by state nurseries, leading to accusations of cronyism. To be considered, applicants had to have been in business in Florida for 30 years and growing at least 400,000 plants.

# Minnesota Adds Pain to Qualifying Conditions

**MN** Minnesota officials last month opened up their medical cannabis program to patients suffering from intractable pain, the most common condition for which patients seek relief with cannabis. Department of Health Commissioner Dr. Ed Ehlinger announced the decision, which he called the "right and compassionate choice," and urged health care providers to do more to help patients manage pain.

Beginning July 1, doctors will be able to certify intractable pain patients for Minnesota's program. Certified patients will be able to access medical cannabis on August 1.

Originally, Minnesota's medical cannabis program included only nine qualifying conditions, but the health commissioner was directed to evaluate other conditions to add, beginning with intractable pain.

# More than 1,000 Apply for Maryland Licenses

**MD** A flood of applicants for medical cannabis business licenses in Maryland have delayed the state's decision. The Maryland Medical Cannabis Commission received more than 1,000 applications. The vast majority, 811, were from groups seeking to open dispensaries. Two will be granted for each of the state's 47 senate district, but three of those districts had considerably more than 100 applicants apiece. Fifteen cultivation applicants will be selected from the 146 who have applied. Regulators will decide how many of the 124

processor applications to approve, but the law sets no limit.

Initial license approvals were expected by the start of 2016, but that will be delayed by the deluge of applicants.

Complicating matters is the resignation of the head of the commission responsible for licensing decisions. Hannah Byron, who has had the post for a year, announced she will step down as executive director on January 27.

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against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988.

Today over two-thirds of the U.S. population live where medical cannabis is legal locally, and over 2.5 million Americans are using it under a doctor's supervision. Canada, Israel, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Croatia, Mexico, Uruguay, Romania, Germany, Jamaica, Australia, and Switzerland all have national medical cannabis programs, and dozens of

other countries are reviewing legislation. These laws all arguably conflict with treaties such as the UN Single Convention.

The International Medical Cannabis Patient Coalition (IMCPC) was established in March at a conference in Prague, where representatives of medical cannabis patient organizations from 13 countries came together. Many countries that might integrate cannabis into medical treatment are constrained by UN treaties, creating conflicts similar to those in the U.S.

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the symptoms associated with their PTSD.

"There's nothing funny about suicidal thoughts, and those are something my family and I lived with day-to-day die to my military-related PTSD," said Navy veteran T.J. Thompson, who helped found the ASA chapter in Virginia. "Using medical marijuana not only helps with my condition, but it has also had the added effect of making me a better father and husband."

Rosenberg had expressed his discomfort with the idea of patients finding therapeutic relief from cannabis, saying "don't call it medicine — that is a joke." That statement was not his



Chuck Rosenberg

first on cannabis since becoming acting head of the DEA. Shortly after he was named to the position, he admitted that he was "not an expert" on cannabis and could not say whether it is more or less dangerous than heroin.

Rosenberg clarified his position a few weeks later, but the stage was set for the calls for his removal.

"We join the more than 100,000 concerned Americans who are urging President Obama to fire Chuck Rosenberg," said Mike Liszewski, ASA Government Affairs Director. "The DEA needs a leader who understands science."

The petition followed on the heels of an angry Congressional letter to President Obama that condemned Rosenberg's remarks for "trivializing" the issue and asked for his removal.

Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), the lead author of the letter, also spoke out on the floor of the House. The other six members who signed the letter are Steve Cohen (D-TN), Sam Farr (D-CA), Ted Lieu (D-CA), Jim McDermott (D-WA) and Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA).

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islature to pass a pair of bills (A. 7060, S. 5086) that create "an expedited pathway" for patients and companies that would provide medicine to them.

The five medical cannabis companies licensed by the state so far say most of the 20 dispensaries they are authorized to open will be serving qualified patients by the original law's mid-January deadline.

Lawmakers are also concerned New York officials have not recruited enough physicians to complete the required four-hour course to issue recommendations, and the limited number of qualified patients will make medicine prices excessive. New York state officials will set retail prices for cannabis products based on reported production costs.

**ACTION ALERT: Tell Congress to Pass the CARERS Act**  
Take action today! Tell your Senators and Representative they need to take comprehensive action on medical cannabis with the Compassionate Access, Research Expansion, and Respect States Act. The CARERS Act would resolve the conflicts between compassionate state laws and outdated federal policies. CARERS would also reschedule cannabis, permit VA doctors to discuss medical cannabis with veterans, and allow cannabis businesses to have bank accounts.  
Sign the Petition to support the CARERS Act at [SafeAccessNow.org/carers](http://SafeAccessNow.org/carers).

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