

# Americans for Safe Access Mobilizes Advocates to Urge VA Secretary to Allow VA Doctors to Recommend Cannabis

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, March 16, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Washington, DC -- [Americans for Safe Access \(ASA\)](#) is mobilizing advocates as part of its [Biden-Harris Can Do It: No Patient Left Behind](#) campaign to contact Secretary Denis McDonough of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs [to allow VA physicians to recommend medical cannabis to veteran patients](#).



Veterans who rely on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as their primary healthcare provider are unable to receive medical cannabis recommendations from their doctors even if they live in one of the 36 states where medical cannabis is legal. To rectify this, the Biden administration and the VA can repeal §3(b) of the Veterans Health Administration Directive 1315, so that cannabis is no longer defined as a drug of abuse. Doing so will enable VA physicians to consult with veterans on medical cannabis and initiate an important process of integrating medical cannabis education and training into the curriculum of VA doctors.

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*Cherissa Jackson, chief medical executive, AMVETS*

The roughly 20 million veterans living in the U.S. experience health challenges ranging from chronic pain, traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder at a higher rate than the general population. According to the VA, nearly 20 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans experience PTSD or depression following their service, with 60 percent of service members returning from duty in the Middle East with some form of chronic pain. Treatment offered for these conditions by the VA typically includes use of opioid-based products, which have well-documented addictive and long-lasting side effects, and are killing veterans at a rate twice that of the civilian population due to accidental overdose.

Meanwhile, ongoing research continues to demonstrate the effectiveness of cannabis as a medicine in treating PTSD, neurological issues and chronic pain, and in reducing opioid dependency: two 2020 studies, one conducted by Wayne State University in Michigan and the other by Brazil's Federal University of Parana, demonstrate that cannabis can reduce anxiety in adults overwhelmed by trauma as well as reducing and eliminating traumatic memories.

Beyond advancements in research, there is also wide support among veterans for federally-sanctioned access to cannabis and education of VA doctors on cannabis as a medicine. Results of a 2017 American Legion study revealed that over 90 percent of veterans support medical cannabis research, with 80 percent surveyed also supporting allowing VA doctors to prescribe cannabis to veterans. In this same survey, 22 percent of veterans said that they were already using medical cannabis to treat chronic pain, PTSD, spasticity, agitation and to improve sleep quality. Furthermore, approximately one in five military veterans currently use state-authorized medical cannabis for treatment.

"AMVETS supports cannabis research as it relates to PTSD and sees the benefits of this plant. Veterans should have access to resources and options that can save their lives. No one and nothing should be left behind," said Cherissa Jackson, chief medical executive, AMVETS.

"Without a doubt, cannabis is my lifesaver! I strongly recommend you support Americans for Safe Access to urge VA Secretary McDonough to allow VA doctors to recommend cannabis to those veterans who are suffering," said Eryck Stamper, founder, Veterans Initiative 22.

"As the largest healthcare system in the country, the VA has an obligation to adopt policies that appropriately serve the needs of the veteran community," said Debbie Churgai, executive director, Americans for Safe Access. "Countless veterans suffer from severe post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, and other major issues resulting from their service to our country. These heroes should not be faced with another battle at home when trying to obtain medical cannabis, a medicine that is safer and less addictive than the more commonly prescribed opioids for their symptom relief."

#### ABOUT AMERICANS FOR SAFE ACCESS

Americans for Safe Access (ASA) is the largest national nonprofit, member-based organization of patients, medical professionals, scientists and concerned citizens promoting safe and legal access to cannabis for therapeutic use and research with over 150,000 supporters in all 50 states.

Reenal Doshi  
Americans for Safe Access  
+1 202-618-6972  
[email us here](#)

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