

## **AMA Reaffirms Opposition to Marijuana Legalization**

Association representing doctors fiddles with drug reform policies

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The American Medical Association's policy-making body voted Tuesday to reaffirm its opposition to marijuana legalization, but also called the current federal approach to reducing the drug's use "ineffective" and endorsed a review of the "risks and benefits" of new legal markets in Colorado and Washington.

The AMA's 527-member House of Delegates decided during its interim meeting in National Harbor, Md., to retain the long-standing position that "cannabis is a dangerous drug and as such is a public health concern."

New language adopted by delegates, however, says "federal efforts to address illicit drug use via supply reduction and enforcement have been ineffective."

Despite that recognition, the AMA walked away from some policy recommendations, deleting an endorsement – in place since 1977 – that urged "modification of state law to reduce the severity of penalties for possession of marijuana."

[DEBATE CLUB: Should Marijuana Be Legalized?]

In that line's place, the body expressed support for "modification of state and federal laws to emphasize public health based strategies to address and reduce cannabis use."

For the crime of pot possession for personal use, the AMA body adopted new language calling for "public health based strategies, rather than incarceration."

The amendments passed by a voice vote and immediately became official AMA policy.

Some subtle shifts in AMA policy could be considered wins by either side of the drug policy debate. Delegates agreed to drop a recommendation that "personal possession of insignificant amounts of that substance be considered a misdemeanor" and the word "possession" was removed from a sentence urging that the sale and possession of marijuana remain a crime.

The AMA is the largest national organization representing American doctors. It occasionally weighs in on other political debates, including advocating for passage of President Barack Obama's 2010 health care law.

[WATCH: McCain Says 'Maybe We Should Legalize' Marijuana]

Former Rep. Patrick Kennedy, D-R.I., who co-founded the anti-legalization group Smart Approaches to Marijuana, praised the preliminary AMA decisions.

"The American Medical Association took a bold step today, and they should be commended," Kennedy said in a released statement. "By explicitly rejecting calls to neutralize their anti-legalization position, they are sending a loud and powerful message to state and local decision makers, the Federal government, and the general public."

Marijuana legalization advocates, however, are optimistic about what a review of state-level legalization might find.

"We are sorry to hear they wish to stay the course in enforcing this failed policy, but we are pleased to hear they are interested in reviewing the potential benefits of the laws passed in Colorado and Washington to regulate marijuana like alcohol," said Mason Tvert, communications director for the Marijuana Policy Project. "Any objective analysis of marijuana will confirm that it is far less harmful than alcohol. If the AMA is truly concerned about public health and safety, it should support a policy in which adults are able to make the safer choice to use marijuana instead of alcohol."

A poll released Oct. 22 by Gallup found 58 percent of American adults believe marijuana should be legalized. Two states are preparing to open recreational marijuana stores in early 2014 and many others are considering legislation or ballot measures that would legalize it.