

First marijuana planted for medical use in Chile (Update)

October 29 2014, by Luis Andres Henao



A member of the Daya Foundation, a nonprofit group that sponsors pain-relieving therapies, shows a container of imported cannabis seeds during a media presentation in La Florida, a municipality of Santiago, Chile, Wednesday, Oct. 29, 2014. The Chilean municipality planted the country's first medical marijuana on Wednesday as part of a pilot program aimed to help ease the pain of cancer patients. The seeds were imported from the Netherlands, and oil extracted from some of the plants will be given to select patients. (AP Photo/Luis Hidalgo)

A Chilean municipality planted the country's first medical marijuana on

Wednesday as part of a pilot program aimed to help ease the pain of cancer patients.

The 850 seeds were imported from the Netherlands, and oil extracted from about half of the plants will be given to 200 patients selected by a municipality in the capital of Santiago and by the Daya Foundation, a nonprofit group that sponsors pain-relieving therapies.

"We're living at a time, in Chile and the rest of the world, where it's not reasonable to close yourself to new evidence. Marijuana can provide some dignity to those who suffer," said La Florida district Mayor Rodolfo Carter, who was inspired to back medical marijuana while watching his late father battle cancer. "It doesn't cure cancer but we can alleviate the pain."

The Chilean experiment adds to an international trend of easing restrictions on marijuana for medical or personal use.

More than 20 U.S. states allow some form of medical marijuana and Colorado and Washington have legalized personal use. In the Americas, Uruguay last year became the first nation to create a legal marijuana market.

Jamaica's justice minister has announced plans to legalize the drug for religious and medical purposes and decriminalize the possession of amounts up to 2 ounces (57 grams). And in Colombia, President Juan Manuel Santos recently endorsed newly introduced legislation to legalize marijuana for medicinal and therapeutic use.



A member of the Daya Foundation, a nonprofit group that sponsors pain-relieving therapies, opens a container of imported cannabis seeds during a media presentation in La Florida, a municipality of Santiago, Chile, Wednesday, Oct. 29, 2014. The Chilean municipality planted the country's first medical marijuana on Wednesday as part of a pilot program aimed to help ease the pain of cancer patients. The seeds were imported from the Netherlands, and oil extracted from some of the plants will be given to select patients. (AP Photo/Luis Hidalgo)

A law passed in 2005 allowed medical use of marijuana in Chile, but only with approval by the country's agricultural service. It approved only one earlier effort, in 2011, but quickly rescinded permission after opposition from health authorities.

This time, the organizers won the backing of the state as well as a local university, which will use the project for research on the effectiveness of marijuana in fighting pain.

The 850-square-meter (9,150 square-foot) plot will be heavily guarded and monitored to ensure that none of the product—which includes the Durga Mata II, Wappa, Icecream and Pandora varieties—drifts into unauthorized uses.

The permit is only for one year, but Daya's president, actress Ana Maria Gazmurri said she hopes it will be renewed.

Some Chileans already have been using marijuana for pain relief, flouting the law or finding legal cracks in the ban.



In this Oct. 22, 2014 photo, Cecilia Heyder, 47, who suffers from systemic lupus and was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2011, poses for a photo holding her oral spray medication, in Santiago, Chile. Heyder was recently granted a three-month permit to import Sativex, a drug derived from cannabis that has helped relieve her pain. A Chilean municipality planted the country's first medical marijuana on Wednesday, Oct 29, 2014, as part of a pilot program aimed to help ease the pain of cancer patients. (AP Photo/Luis Hidalgo)

"I'm neither a trafficker nor a criminal. The fact that I'm ill shouldn't mean I have to hide," said Cecilia Heyder, 47, who suffers from systemic lupus and was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2011.

Her cancer has metastasized despite the removal of one of her breasts and chemotherapy. Her body rejects opiates including morphine and tramadol, she said, and she was recently granted a three-month permit to import Sativex, a drug derived from cannabis has helped her relieve the pain, breathe easier and improve her sleep. But she said she's worried that she'll run out of medication by the end of the year.

"I'm sorry to see that lawmakers don't understand that the clock is running against me," she said. "I have a stage-four cancer. I'm a terminal patient and I'm going to die."

Daya also has launched a blog where parents of children suffering from epilepsy share their concerns. Some even started growing small patches of pot to produce cannabis oil—though they won't be allowed to participate in the current program, which is limited to adults.

"If the plantations of these families are raided; if they take away their cannabis plants, they'll be taking away the medicine for their children," Gazmurri said.

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