

Colorado medical pot law poised to add PTSD as qualifier

September 21 2016, by Kristen Wyatt

Marijuana pioneer Colorado is poised to add post-traumatic stress disorder to its medical marijuana program, joining 18 other states that consider PTSD a condition treatable by pot.

A panel of state lawmakers voted 5-0 Wednesday to endorse the addition of PTSD to Colorado's 2000 medical pot law. The vote doesn't have legal effect; it's just a recommendation to the full Legislature, which resumes work in January. But the vote indicates a dramatic shift for a state that has allowed medical pot for more than a decade but hasn't endorsed its use for PTSD.

"Cannabis treats all the multiple issues that are going on with PTSD like no other drug," said Dr. Joseph Cohen, a physician who recommends marijuana to patients for other ailments and testified in favor of adding PTSD to the medical program.

Colorado's change would put Colorado in line with 18 other states and Washington, D.C., that allow cannabis for PTSD treatment. Montana voters will decide in November whether to make the same change.

The PTSD vote came over the objections of Colorado's Health Department, which has opposed the PTSD addition in the past, citing a lack of research.

The agency was absent from Wednesday's hearing and declined a request for comment on PTSD and marijuana. The Colorado Board of Health

has rejected four separate applications to add PTSD to Colorado's list of eight qualifying ailments, which include cancer, AIDS and glaucoma.

Medical objections were raised Wednesday by a lobbyist speaking for the Colorado Medical Society and Colorado Psychiatric Society.

"There's insufficient medical evidence that marijuana is an effective treatment" for PTSD, said Debbie Wagner, a lobbyist speaking for the medical societies.

Colorado has already approved a first-of-its-kind medical study of marijuana as a PTSD treatment. The \$2 million study has been approved by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and includes 76 military veterans. The study isn't yet complete.

Colorado has about 100,000 medical marijuana patients. No one has produced an estimate of how many additional patients may join the registry for PTSD treatment.

Though Colorado voted in 2012 to allow marijuana use without a doctor's recommendation, the medical pot program persists. That's because the marijuana expansion applies only to people over 21. Also, a doctor's recommendation for pot allows patients to possess more marijuana than they'd be allowed otherwise, and the patients pay dramatically lower taxes than their recreational counterparts.

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