

# Surgeon General: Federal drug classification needs changes

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The nation's drug classification system should be revisited but illegal drugs shouldn't simply be decriminalized nationwide, U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams told a gathering of police leaders focused on the opioids crisis Thursday in Boston.

"Our scheduling system is functioning, but not as ideally as it could," he said of the federal schedule for controlled substances maintained by the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Food and Drug Administration. "Things aren't static. We have to continue to evolve."

Adams, who serves as the primary adviser on [public health](#) and scientific issues for U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar, said one concern is that researchers are having difficulty studying the medical potential of marijuana because of the drug's classification.

The DEA considers marijuana a "Schedule I" drug along with heroin and LSD because it has no "currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse," according to its website.

"Just as we need to look at our criminal justice laws, we need to look at our health laws and regulations, and that includes the scheduling system," Adams said.

But Adams said he isn't supportive of "across-the-board" decriminalization of [illegal drugs](#) as some countries in Europe have tried.

"I don't think it's the federal government's place. I don't personally think it makes the country safer," he told the roughly 400 law enforcement officials from about 30 states in attendance.

He said the federal government should instead encourage local jurisdictions to develop drug policies that work for them.

"Local control and local innovation is what I'm all about," said Adams, who was appointed by President Donald Trump last year after serving as Indiana's State Health Commissioner under then-Governor Mike Pence, who is now Trump's vice president. "What works in Boston, Massachusetts, isn't going to work in Dallas, Texas and vice versa."

As the national opioid epidemic rages, Adams said his office is focused on addiction prevention and education efforts around prescription painkillers.

It's also pushing for expanded use of naloxone, an overdosing-reversal drug, among emergency responders and families dealing with substance abuse. His office issued a recent advisory stressing the importance of it close at hand and having the proper training to administer it.

The two-day summit at Harvard Medical School runs through Friday and is being hosted by the Police Assisted Addiction & Recovery Initiative.

The Massachusetts-based organization supports police efforts nationwide that are trying to get more people struggling with [drug](#) addiction into treatment programs.

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