



Getting to the Bottom of the Cannabis Debate

by [Stephen F. Gambescia](#) January 13, 2026

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A fair way to explain Donald Trump’s December [executive order](#) to increase medical marijuana and cannabidiol research is an overused, but appropriate, phrase in this case: cautious optimism.

The rationale for the order to reclassify cannabis to give scientists and manufacturers of cannabis the liberty to complete the necessary research on safety and efficacy to inform doctors and patients in using the drug is commendable. However, we should keep in mind that to date, no major and credible medical organization has confidently affirmed that cannabis has medicinal value. [They call for further research](#) on its safety and efficacy.

It makes sense for the federal government to support research to gain “real-world evidence” that guides doctors and patients in its use and to learn more

about short-, mid-, and long-term effects on users, especially youth who invariably will be taking this controlled substance.

Meantime, it is accurate to say the use of marijuana for something that ails you is compassionate care, not medicinal curative care, as cannabis placates pain and other health-compromising symptoms. We should not deprive those with conditions or diseases, such as cancer, PTSD, Alzheimer's, anorexia and AIDS, of relief from pain and discomfort.

For example, [I reviewed state legislative actions \(33 at the time\)](#), to legalize medical marijuana to determine the nature and extent of how quality patient care is explicated in the rationale statements for these laws. The five domains of quality patient care are: a) safe; b) effective; c) evidence-based; d) standard practice; and e) patient-centered care. I found that the rationale for legalizing medical marijuana is driven by compassionate care, not by evidence-based, effective and safe care.

Consider that we acquiesce to those who are enthusiastic or confident about cannabis's medicinal value, then the reasonable and responsible next step should be to dispense the drug through pharmacies. Unfortunately, a profit-driven motive has usurped this standard medical treatment practice by setting up a unique cottage industry for selling a controlled drug — all for investors and state and local governments to make money.

Given that this major regulatory change aims to understand the possible virtues of cannabis use, beware that investors, government officials and a range of apologists will see the normalizing use of cannabis products as a natural next step. The normalizing movement, which has been continuing for decades, is not driven by “following the science” of the many known and mounting evidence of the deleterious effects of recreational marijuana. It will be seen as a victory in winning a socio-cultural war against those Puritan killjoys who don't want “responsible adults” enjoying their dope.

Furthermore, expecting this nascent industry to act responsibly in controlling minors' access to these products is naïve. We have decades of experience

showing that [youth are drawn to forbidden fruits](#) such as tobacco, alcohol and, now, vaping. Public health and school system educators have proven to be no match for the marketing tactics employed by these questionable enterprises.

Touting a [“keeping up with the Jones’s” argument](#), given that more states are legalizing recreational pot, and reporting on surveys that most adults support legalizing pot, and comparing pot to alcohol, given it has similar habit-forming and deleterious health effects, should not overshadow the growing health reports that using a drug that leaves you “dazed and confused” is not a wise practice.

Let’s hope that the government and its agencies, as well as other entities involved in cannabis health research, such as universities and hospitals, follow the science in this project.

Truth seekers should anticipate a skeptical audience when presenting any damaging reports about the drug, like the [longstanding denial by the tobacco industry](#) regarding the harmful effects of tobacco use. Those advocating strongly for the normalization of marijuana must be smiling like the camel whose head slipped under a tent.

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