

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Secretary Alfredo Vigil, MD

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Health Secretary Adds Severe Chronic Pain with Specific Criteria to Medical Cannabis Program

(Santa Fe) – Health Secretary Alfredo Vigil, MD, announced today that the New Mexico Department of Health is adding severe chronic pain to the Department’s Medical Cannabis Program. To qualify, patients must have objective proof of severe chronic pain (X-rays, CT scans, MRIs) and receive two recommendations, one from their primary care physician and one from a specialist consulting on their case. Medical cannabis must be patients’ treatment of last resort because no other medication has provided relief.

“There is substantial support in medical literature that medical cannabis can relieve chronic unremitting pain, but we do not want an overly broad definition of chronic pain that might result in abuse of medical marijuana. We are trying to target a narrow group of people who have severe chronic pain and can’t get relief from any other treatment,” Dr. Vigil said. “We will not approve diagnoses to make medical cannabis a routine treatment. It must be the last resort.”

The eight-member Medical Advisory Board held a public hearing in April and recommended approving eight conditions, including Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, post polio syndrome, three kinds of arthritis, Inclusion Body Myositis (chronic muscle inflammation accompanied by muscle weakness) and severe chronic pain. Dr. Vigil did not approve the seven anti-inflammatory or neurodegenerative diseases because there is very little evidence of clinical efficacy of medical cannabis in managing these diseases.

“There was no scientific evidence that medical cannabis would be an acceptable treatment for people with these conditions,” Dr. Vigil said. “We cannot add those diseases into the program until clinical studies are available that support an appropriate role for medical cannabis.”

The Lynn and Erin Compassionate Use Act allows the Health Secretary to add new conditions to the medical cannabis program if patients petition the Medical Advisory Board, which makes recommendations to the Secretary. Dr. Vigil bases his decisions on a review of scientific literature that shows the conditions could be helped by medical cannabis and that the addition of new conditions meets the purpose of the state law, which is to provide relief from pain and suffering associated with debilitating medical conditions.

The 15 current qualifying conditions for medical cannabis are:

Severe chronic pain
Painful peripheral neuropathy

Intractable nausea/vomiting
Severe anorexia/cachexia
Hepatitis C infection currently receiving antiviral treatment
Crohn's disease
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease)
Cancer
Glaucoma
Multiple sclerosis
Damage to the nervous tissue of the spinal cord with intractable spasticity
Epilepsy
HIV/AIDS
Hospice patients

Once a condition is approved, anyone with that medical condition can apply to the Medical Cannabis Program. To apply for the Medical Cannabis program or to petition for a new condition, look up <http://www.nmhealth.org/marijuana.html> or call the Medical Cannabis Program Coordinator at 505-670-3885.

For all conditions, physicians must certify that patients have an eligible condition, and the condition is debilitating and not helped by standard treatments. Physicians must also attest that they have informed patients of the potential risks and benefits associated with using medical cannabis for their condition. For post traumatic stress disorder, a psychiatrist must certify that patients have the disorder.

Since the Medical Cannabis Program began July 1, 2007, the Department of Health has approved 295 patient applications. There are 47 patients approved to produce medical cannabis for themselves.

In March, the Department approved the first nonprofit in New Mexico to produce medical cannabis for patients in the Medical Cannabis Program. Nonprofits are allowed to produce up to 95 mature plants and seedlings as well as a usable inventory of medical cannabis to meet the needs of patients in the program. The Department is reviewing an additional nine producer applications from nonprofits.