



MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM
Governor

PATRICK M. ALLEN
Cabinet Secretary

Final Decision Regarding Petition for Insomnia to be included as a qualifying condition for enrollment in the Medical Cannabis Program

I. Petition:

I have reviewed the recommendation of the Medical Cannabis Advisory Board contained in their report, which was based on the Advisory Board's findings at a public hearing held on March 7, 2023.

Having reviewed the Medical Cannabis Advisory Board's recommendation and the materials submitted, and in consideration of the purpose of the Lynn and Erin Compassionate Use Act to allow the use of medical cannabis for alleviating symptoms caused by debilitating medical conditions and their treatments, I am taking the following action with regards to the petition and the recommendation submitted to the Department of Health.

II. Decision:

I am adopting the recommendation of the Medical Cannabis Advisory Board that the Department of Health add Insomnia to the list of debilitating medical conditions qualifying for participation in the New Mexico Medical Cannabis Program effective June 1, 2023.

III. Discussion:

Insomnia is a common medical complaint experienced by 50 to 70 million U.S. adults¹ and that generates over five million office visits per year in the United States². Each year, about 25 percent of Americans will experience acute insomnia³ and about 10 to 15 percent of adults will deal with chronic insomnia⁴. Despite advances in pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy, insomnia and sleep disorders remain a significant burden to society. Given its ability to affect the endocannabinoid system, medical cannabis may prove to be an additional tool in the alleviation of symptoms in individuals exhibiting insomnia.

Cannabis, specifically with strains containing small amounts of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), can have a positive impact on sleep⁵. At lower doses, THC can reduce sleep onset latency and has been associated with greater ease of falling asleep, increased slow-wave sleep, and increased total sleep time⁶. Cannabidiol (CBD), the second most abundant cannabinoid found in cannabis, when used in higher doses has been shown to increase total sleep time and decrease the frequency of arousals during the night⁷.

Even though patients may access cannabis without a medical cannabis card through the adult use program, by including insomnia in the list of qualifying conditions, patients would have increased opportunity to discuss with their medical provider how cannabis can be used to impact their insomnia and help them sleep better. From a health equity perspective, medical cannabis can offer a legal alternative to the expensive medications sometimes utilized by those suffering with insomnia⁷.

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Additionally, an important part of incorporating medical supervision is to help patients identify the strains of cannabis that are more relaxing with a pronounced sedative quality. Indica-dominant strains are typically the best choice for treating insomnia. Indica strains usually induce a sleepy feeling that helps one drift off and stay asleep⁸. Additionally, the cannabinoid called cannabitol (CBN) tends to have a sedation effect, so choosing a strain high in CBN may also be a good choice⁹.

There are other reasons to advocate for the use of medical cannabis as a tool to improve sleep. Many patients who seek medical cannabis for sleep and related disorders have often tried many of the conventional pharmacologic therapies and have experienced undesirable side effects⁷. Side effects from conventional pharmacological therapies include dizziness, cognitive impairment, daytime sedation, weight gain and metabolic syndromes⁷. Additionally, many patients report that when compared to conventional sleep medications, cannabis works better, is not as potentially habit-forming, and is safer in case of an accidental overdose⁷.

Adding insomnia to the list of qualifying conditions would enable patients to enroll in the Medical Cannabis Program under a condition that more appropriately reflects their circumstances. From the Cannabis Public Policy Consultant study conducted in 2022, 38% of patients identified “sleep/insomnia” as the reason they are using cannabis even though it is not a qualifying condition¹⁰. The only conditions identified more often than sleep insomnia were PTSD, Anxiety, and Pain, all of which are already considered qualifying conditions.

Given the impact cannabis may have on the developing brain, pregnant mothers and younger individuals would need to specifically weigh the potential risks and benefits of cannabis use for insomnia before using medical cannabis¹¹. Medical providers may want to consider extra caution and guidance when certifying patients from these groups.

Furthermore, caution is also advised for those individuals who use cannabis frequently and are seeking to discontinue its use. Withdrawal from chronic cannabis use may exacerbate sleep problems¹². Adults withdrawing from cannabis reported sleep difficulty as one of the most severe symptoms of cannabis withdrawal¹².

IV. Closing:

In closing, I would like to thank the individual(s) who submitted this petition for consideration and the Medical Cannabis Advisory Board members who volunteer their time and their expertise in support of the Medical Cannabis Program. These efforts enable both current and future patients enrolled in the Medical Cannabis Program the ability to obtain relief from their debilitating medical conditions.

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Patrick M. Allen
Cabinet Secretary

May 10, 2023 | 4:01 PM MDT
Date

V. References:

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