



# Best practices and remaining gaps towards a European approach to medicinal cannabis

Online event

**29 March 2022 14.30-16.00 (CEST)**

Report

On 29 March 2022, the European Parliament interest group on medicinal cannabis and Medicinal Cannabis Europe organised an online webinar “Best practices and remaining gaps towards a European approach to medicinal cannabis”. The online event brought together members of the European Parliament and the European Commission, as well as the French and Czech national representatives, the medical and patients’ communities and the medicinal cannabis industry.

In his introductory remarks, **MEP Robert Biedroń** highlighted the benefits of medicinal cannabis in treating various health conditions, such as epilepsy, multiple sclerosis and fibromyalgia, as well as the hurdles that patients are facing across Europe. MEP Biedroń mentioned the European Parliament resolution issued back in 2019 which called on the European Commission to address the hurdles in accessing medicinal cannabis and reiterated that the European Parliament interest group on medicinal cannabis will continue promoting an EU-wide approach on the topic that would help overcome the current regulatory fragmentation at the national level.

The event continued with a keynote speech from the French Ministry of Health and Solidarity, followed by a presentation from the French and Czech national authorities – the current and upcoming EU Presidency – about their approaches to medicinal cannabis. A panel featuring the medicinal cannabis value chain and the European Commission discussed the role of the EU in addressing some of the gaps and obstacles presented by national authorities.

## France

**Emilie Sam** from the French Ministry of Solidarity and Health underlined that the French Presidency of the Council is supportive of initiatives aimed at increasing accessibility to and affordability of treatments and medicines, indicating medicinal cannabis as a great example of what European healthcare systems are doing in relation to patients’ access. In this regard, France kick-started a two-year experiment on medicinal cannabis in March 2021.

The details of the French experiment on medicinal cannabis were presented by **Nathalie Richard** and **Frédéric Dittenit** from the French National Agency for Medicines and Health Products Safety (ANSM). Over the past year, almost 1500 patients were able to participate in the experiment in over 250 hospitals across France. As a next step, ANSM will submit an assessment report about the outcomes to the French government. The report will provide suggestions for the next steps, as well as recommendations on how to improve patients’ access to medicinal cannabis.

Finally, **Line Legrand** and **Guillaume Gilardeau** from the French Ministry of Solidarity and Health informed about the plan of the French government to create a domestic cultivation and production chain of medicinal cannabis in the country, for both internal use – once the experimentation will be over and provided that its outcome is positive – and for export towards other Member States. Open questions however remain regarding the status of cannabis-based medicines, as well as the terms and conditions for reimbursement under the French social security.

## Czech Republic

**Jindřich Vobořil**, the national drug policy coordinator of Czech Republic, presented the current situation with medicinal cannabis in the country. An increasing number of Czech patients are using cannabis-based medication to treat chronic diseases, however, the country has yet to tackle several shortcomings to allow patients' equal access. A major hurdle addressed by Mr. Vobořil is the knowledge gap within the medical community, which is due to the lack of sufficient scientific evidence. He also stressed that Czech Republic needs to develop its medicinal cannabis regulation towards personalised medicine, which will allow for a patient-centred approach and will result in better outcomes for patients.

## Panel discussion

**Jaqueline Poitras**, founder of Mamaka – Mothers for Cannabis, pointed out the fragmented approach to medicinal cannabis in Member States. In order to tackle inconsistencies across Europe, the European Commission should take the lead and provide national authorities with guidelines on best practices, which will help harmonise countries' practices and facilitate access to safe and high-quality medication to patients.

**Dr. Gudrun Gallhoff** from the European Commission DG SANTE Unit "Health systems, medical products and innovation" explained the work the European Commission is carrying out together with the European Medical Agency and the Herbal Medicinal Products Committee (HMPC) to provide a glossary of terms for medicinal cannabis, which is the first step towards harmonisation. Dr. Gallhoff indicated that work is continuing and that the HMPC has set up a dedicated Working Group with representatives from Member States.

**Finn Age Hänsel**, founder of Sanity Group, talked about the lack of harmonisation not just between the Member States but also within one country – Germany – where provinces have different rules on the production and usage of medicinal cannabis. Furthermore, he raised the issue of health insurance and reimbursement, emphasising that in Germany doctors need to go through an extensive bureaucratic procedure to prescribe medicinal cannabis to patients, which is often a reason why some doctors decide against prescribing medicinal cannabis.

**Dr. Babak Baban**, Professor and Associate Dean For Research at the Medical College of Georgia, USA, pointed out that the current knowledge gap on medicinal cannabis is hindering doctors from prescribing medicinal cannabis to their patients. In order to fill this knowledge gap and provide doctors with all the necessary information to enable them to confidently prescribe cannabis-based medication, it is crucial to carry out more clinical trials and studies on medicinal cannabis. The

European Commission has a role to play by allocating more research and innovation funds on the topic.

### Closing remarks

**MEP Tilly Metz** thanked all the participants and concluded the event by outlining the importance of having a multi-stakeholder dialogue on this issue in order to discuss the challenges and find solutions. MEP Metz stressed the importance of putting patients in the centre of the European framework on medicinal cannabis and facilitating equal access to safe and high-quality cannabis-based medications.

Lastly, MEP Metz stressed that the European Parliament interest group on medicinal cannabis will continue its work to support an EU-wide framework on medicinal cannabis, building on the European Parliament resolution issued in 2019, and will work towards a European Parliament own-initiative report on medicinal cannabis, which will identify key opportunities at EU level to promote patients' fair access.