

# American Legion to Veterans Affairs: Support MAPS' Phase 2 Trial of Marijuana for PTSD



Denise Rohan,  
American Legion National Commander

ON SEPTEMBER 20, 2017, American Legion National Commander Denise Rohan sent a letter to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary David Shulkin urging the VA to support MAPS' ongoing Phase 2 clinical trial of smoked marijuana for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) taking place at the Scottsdale Research Institute in Phoenix, Arizona. Although qualifying participants continue to be enrolled in the trial at a slow rate, the rate of enrollment would be increased significantly if the VA would agree to refer veteran patients to the trial.

To date, the VA has not been willing to provide referrals, delaying the study's progress. If the trial is not able to enroll a sufficient number of qualifying veteran participants within a reasonable time frame, MAPS will ask permission from federal regulatory agencies as well as the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, which is funding the study, for permission to expand the study to people suffering from PTSD from any cause, including but not limited to military service.

The text of the letter follows:

Dr. Mr. Secretary:

For more than a year, The American Legion has called on the federal government to support and enable scientific research to clinically confirm the medicinal value of cannabis. The National Academy of Medicine recently reviewed 10,000 scientific abstracts on the therapeutic value of cannabis and reached nearly 100 conclusions in a report issued earlier this year. As a two million member strong veteran service organization, our primary interest and advocacy is grounded in the wellbeing and improved health of our veterans, and specifically our service disabled veterans.

The Scottsdale Research Institute, outside of Phoenix Arizona, is currently in phase one of an FDA-Approved Marijuana/PTSD research study, being conducted in collaboration with the National Institute of Health (NIH) National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). This study is a Placebo-Controlled, Triple-Blind, Randomized Crossover Pilot Study of the Safety and Efficacy of Four Different Potencies of Smoked Marijuana in 76 Veterans with Chronic, Treatment-Resistant Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The American Legion is a strong, vocal proponent of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and has published several books, pamphlets, and magazines that help showcase VA's value to The United States of America. Our members have long been a ferocious advocate for evidence-based, complementary and alternative medicines and therapies. For decades, we have supported increased funding and research in such therapies as hyperbaric oxygen therapy, Quantitative Electroencephalography (QEEG), animal therapy, recreational therapy, meditation, and mindfulness therapies, just to name a few, to improve outcomes for veterans confronted with PTSD.

The American Legion supports VA's statutory medical research mission and has donated millions of dollars toward expanding VA's scientific research. VA innovation is widely championed for their breakthrough discoveries in medicine and has been recognized over the years with three Nobel Prizes for scientific work that has benefited the world over.

The research being conducted by the Scottsdale Institute is the first cannabis based research of its kind in The United States and could potentially produce scientific evidence that will enhance, improve, and save the lives of veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Many veterans have approached us to tell us that access to cannabis has materially improved their health and well-being. While their stories are very compelling, we need clinical evidence to have a fact-based discussion on the future of cannabis policy.

As a scientific research leader in this country with a statutory obligation to care for and improve the lives of our nation's veterans, The American Legion calls on the Department of Veterans Affairs to assist the Scottsdale Institute, in accordance with VA's existing policies and regulations (VHA Directive 1200 §2.b and §5.t VHA Handbook 1200.01 §8.g and §10.a(1) VHA Handbook 1200.05 §3.xxx(note)) that states, in part;

*“NOTE: This guidance does not preclude VA clinicians, in the normal course of their clinical duties, from discussing specific research studies with their patients where appropriate, and referring them to a non-VA investigator for more information about a non-VA study. However, VA personnel should not provide the non-VA investigator with the names or contact information of Veterans who might be eligible for the study. Instead, the VA clinician should provide the Veteran with the contact information for the non-VA investigator so the Veteran may initiate contact if he/she is interested in participating in the non-VA study.”*

The Carl T. Hayden Phoenix VA Health Care System is ideally geographically located to assist with this effort and should enthusiastically take the lead in assisting with this research study. There is an overwhelming body of evidence suggests that cannabis is effective in treating a number of service connected related illnesses, including PTSD and chronic pain, the two most persistent and widespread illnesses and injuries plaguing our veteran community. Without the assistance of the Department, this study is in jeopardy of failing due to lack of viable test participants. Project scientists have screened thousands of applicants, but due to the strict requirements of the study which is required to produce reliable scientific data, nearly 99 percent of these applicants are eliminated for a variety of screening reasons. This study needs 50 more participants and the Phoenix VA is in the best possible position to assist by simply allowing principle investigators to brief VAMC medical staff on the progress of the study, and by allowing clinicians to reveal the existence of the study to potential participants.

Your immediate attention in this important matter is greatly appreciated. We ask for your direct involvement to ensure this critical research is fully enabled.

Sincerely,

Denise H. Rohan

