



# ECAD NEWSLETTER



EUROPEAN CITIES AGAINST DRUGS

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## Another thing Europe doesn't agree on

Europe has yet to come up with a unified approach to medical marijuana. The Dutch will tell you it is legal to use the drug to treat certain illnesses; while the Swedish don't recognize any medical use for cannabis at all. "European policy is not really changing at all and I don't think this issue is even on the European agenda.

The topic is too controversial and too political," said Catherine Sandvos, a legal expert for the Hague-based Cannabis Bureau, a Dutch national agency aimed at providing high-quality cannabis for medical purposes.

Ms. Sandvos's native Netherlands has led Europe when it comes to legalizing medical marijuana, which it treats separately from marijuana legally available at one of Amsterdam's famous coffee shops.

The Dutch police stopped enforcing laws against marijuana in 1976 following an overall tolerance policy in the country. "It's hard when you try to explain to outsiders that it is illegal to grow cannabis in the Netherlands, but that it is tolerated to buy it," she says. But those who buy the drug on the streets are not getting the quality severely ill patients would need. The Dutch government set up the Cannabis Bureau -- the only institution of its kind in the continent -- in September 2003. "The state realized that so many people wanted to use cannabis, so it said 'why not give it to them via prescription instead of them accessing the drug illegally,'" Ms. Sandvos added.

The Cannabis Bureau ensures that patients who have a prescription from a doctor are getting marijuana that has been tested to make sure it doesn't contain any pesticides or bacteria. Not only does the Cannabis Bureau sell cannabis across all pharmacies in the Netherlands through a prescription, but it also distributes the drug to Italy, Finland and Germany through the Ministry of Health of each country. According to the agency's data, it sells around 100 kilos of cannabis every year.

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## Cannabis damages young brains more than originally thought

Canadian teenagers are among the largest consumers of cannabis worldwide. The damaging effects of this illicit drug on young brains are worse than originally thought, according to new research by Dr. Gabriella Gobbi, a psychiatric researcher from the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre. The new study, published in *Neurobiology of Disease*, suggests that daily consumption of cannabis in teens can cause depression and anxiety, and have an irreversible long-term effect on the brain.

"We wanted to know what happens in the brains of teenagers when they use cannabis and whether they are more susceptible to its neurological effects than adults," explained Dr. Gobbi, who is also a professor at McGill University.

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## Happy New Year!



After one day comes another. This happens every week, month and year in everyone's life. Is it not strange therefore that when the next day is the first one of a new year, we look a year ahead and make promises and we have certain expectations and hopes! I do not expect the year 2010 to be the one when we get a drug free Europe or even drug free cities. However, I do hope that we will get more people and cities engaged and involved in this very important task.



This would be an important step towards fewer drugs and in the end, maybe drug-free cities.

It is obvious that local politicians in every city have a lot of important issues to deal with; care of the elderly and youngsters, unemployment, schools and the financial crisis, to mention a few. Criminality and social stigmatisation are other important responsibilities. We have to realise that illicit drugs and the ways of dealing with this problem are embedded in the social welfare sector of most cities and are only few of many tasks that our decision makers handle. Raising common awareness regarding illicit drugs and placing this issue on the top of the political agenda may be one of the most important tasks for ECAD in the future.

No politician in Europe wants people to be abusers and very few, if any, want to legalise drugs because they do not care about the effects. Too many are nevertheless unaware of the huge costs illicit drugs cause for a single taxpayer and society all in all.

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## NIDA: high sensation seekers more likely to abuse drugs

*Sensation seeking is a personality trait that includes the tendency to pursue thrill and adventure, the willingness to take risks, and easy susceptibility to boredom. People classified as high sensation seekers (HSSs) are more likely to abuse drugs and engage in other risky behaviors than low sensation seekers (LSSs). The specific brain systems responsible for sensation seeking are not well understood.*

A new study funded by NIDA has used brain-imaging technology to show that during a decision game, chronic marijuana users show less activity in an error-processing part of their brains than peers who do not use marijuana. These results provide preliminary evidence in the

debate on whether substance abusers willfully ignore their problem or whether cognitive deficits prevent them from fully understanding their addiction and its potential consequences.

Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) of 16 heavy marijuana users and 16 non-drug-using peers provided real-time pictures of brain activity during the decision game. The marijuana abusers in the study did not make more mistakes during the game than participants who did not use the drug, but they were significantly less likely to recognize that they had made the mistakes.



Picture: <http://www.psychologytoday.com>

Non-marijuana-using participants were aware of 91 percent of their mistakes during the game, and marijuana abusers were aware of only 77 percent of their mistakes. FMRI revealed that when they made errors that they did not consciously recognize, the marijuana abusers showed less activity than the other participants in an area of the brain called the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC). The authors caution that marijuana withdrawal may have played some role in the lack of error awareness, as higher scores in several categories on a marijuana craving questionnaire were associated with poorer error awareness. However, if drug abusers cannot monitor their behavior accurately, this deficit in awareness may contribute to their continued use of a drug despite the consequences or to their continued associations with situations that make them liable to relapse.

Hester R, Nestor L, Garavan H. Impaired Error Awareness and Anterior Cingulate Cortex Hypoactivity in Chronic Cannabis Users. *Neuropsychopharmacology*. 2009 Jun 24.

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Her study points to an apparent action of cannabis on two important compounds in the brain -- serotonin and norepinephrine -- which are involved in the regulation of neurological functions such as mood control and anxiety.

"Teenagers who are exposed to cannabis have decreased serotonin transmission, which leads to mood disorders, as well as increased norepinephrine transmission, which leads to greater long-term susceptibility to stress," Dr. Gobbi stated. Previous epidemiological studies have shown how cannabis consumption can affect behaviour in some teenagers.

"Our study is one of the first to focus on the neurobiological mechanisms at the root of this influence of cannabis on depression and anxiety in adolescents," confirmed Dr. Gobbi. It is also the first study to demonstrate that cannabis consumption causes more serious damage during adolescence than adulthood.

Dr. Gabriella Gobbi is a researcher at the neuroscience axis of the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre and also a psychiatrist and associate professor at the Department of Psychiatry, McGill University.

This study was funded by a grant from The Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation (CPRF)

By Science Daily

Source: <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/12/091217115834.htm>

NEW RESEARCH



## Psychotic? No, just on cannabis!

Some experts believe skunk is so potent it should be treated differently from other types of cannabis and put on a par with Class A drugs such as cocaine and Ecstasy. Last month Professor David Nutt was forced to step down as chairman of the Government's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs after criticising the decision to push cannabis back into the more serious Class B after a period of downgrading. The number of under-25s smoking cannabis was almost one in five last year, even though use has been falling since 2001.

This latest study, published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, involved 280 patients aged 18 to 65 attending a South London hospital with a first episode of psychosis, compared with 174 healthy people. Those with psychosis were twice as likely to have used cannabis for longer than five years, and more than six times likely to take it every day.

Significantly cannabis users who smoked skunk were 6.8 times more at risk of being treated for a psychosis than those who took hash.

/ Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1232170/Skunk-cannabis-smokers-seven-times-likely-suffer-psychosis.html#ixzz0YQnFZRPG>

*According to new research, regular users double their risk of psychosis but heavy skunk users increase theirs seven-fold. UK experts have a theory it is down to skunk's composition - it contains more of the chemical that gets users stoned.*

*The work is published in British Journal of Psychiatry*



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The situation couldn't be more different in the U.K., where it is unlawful to self-medicate cannabis regardless of the disease people suffer from. In 2005, Barry Quayle and Reay Wales, who were both afflicted by serious and chronic conditions, found no relief in prescription drugs and turned to cannabis to alleviate their pain. But a U.K. court ruled against them.

"The whole debate in relation to the use of cannabis for medical purposes is highly politicized," said Daniel Godden, an associate solicitor for Hodge Jones & Allen LLP in London. **Those who say marijuana is relatively safe can face severe political consequences. Last November, Professor David Nutt, the British government's chief drug adviser, was removed from his post after he said the drug was less harmful than alcohol.**

Favorable views toward cannabis face opposition from some local politicians and international lobbying groups.

Jorgen Svidén, director of Stockholm-based European Cities Against Drugs, which represents 261 cities in 30 countries, isn't convinced of the drug's medical qualities.

*"In principle, we don't have an argument against cannabis as a treatment, but we haven't seen any scientific evidence that provides a convincing argument for its medical use,"* he said. *"If in the future we come across proof that cannabis is a good treatment, then this is good."*

Some initiatives have managed to stay away from the political debate, however.

The U.K. happens to be home to GW Pharmaceuticals PLC, which manufactures a drug based on marijuana extract -- Sativex. Although it has some ingredients that derived from the actual drug, it has been treated by the U.K.'s regulators as a medicine like any other as it doesn't contain the psychotropic substances marijuana does. The company is preparing to launch the drug into other parts of Europe, in partnership with Germany's Bayer AG and Spain's Almirall SA.

GW is hoping to sell its product, which will treat the symptoms of multiple sclerosis, across all countries in Europe but has initially filed for a license in the U.K. and Spain so far. Paul Cuddon, an analyst with KBC Peel Hunt in London, says he expects the drug to win approval in both countries in the first half of 2010 and then the firm will file for individual approval in each country.

*"I'm not anticipating any legal problems in the rest of Europe at all,"* Mr. Cuddon added. *"This is a treatment that is highly different from raw cannabis and it has undergone rigorous chemical trials."*

Other countries have tough stances, however. **Ireland, for example, doesn't recognize marijuana as a drug with medical benefits. This means that manufacturing, producing, selling or possessing cannabis is unlawful for any purpose.** The Ministry of Health is the only government branch that can grant an exception, but a spokesman

said it never has.

Noel McCullagh, 34, has learned this the hard way. An Irish citizen, Mr. McCullagh lives in the Netherlands, where he uses cannabis medication to treat the severe effects of his muscular dystrophy. However, Irish authorities have warned him that he will be arrested if he enters his native country in possession of cannabis-based treatment. **In Sweden, the law doesn't recognize the cannabis to have any medical use.**

**Beyond the debate of marijuana's use, Dr. Willem Scholten, of the World Health Organization, believes patients should have access to high-quality medicine.** So if cannabis has medical attributions, "there needs to be a system in place to ensure that patients get their medicine without any contamination and that they get the same content every time."

**Despite the radically different approaches in Europe, some believe the continent will eventually adopt it as a medical treatment.**

*"I can imagine European citizens will eventually think cannabis is a good medicine and that it should be accessible to people who suffer from serious pain as a result of HIV, multiple sclerosis or other grave illnesses,"* said Brendan Hughes, senior legal analyst of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction in Lisbon.

/By: JAVIER ESPINOZA

Printed in The Wall Street Journal, page A15

Bilden kommer från:

<http://blogs.zdnet.com/open-source/>

## Deadly legal and cheap

You can use the 'bank note' to snort Mephedrone like someone would a line of cocaine. It can also be taken in tablet form like ecstasy. Either way, it produces the same feeling of euphoria. That's the selling point, if you like, of this new party drug. Another is the price. It's dirt cheap. You - or, to be more precise, your children - can buy a gram of Mephedrone for around £7 or even less (one gram equals about five 'doses'). There is also a third benefit. Unlike cocaine or ecstasy, Mephedrone - which is known as 'meow meow' - is legal in the UK, which is why it can even be delivered directly to your front door, up until 3am every day of the week in London, with a few clicks of a computer mouse.

The downside? Side-effects include convulsions, breathing problems, nose bleeds, depression, psychosis - and, in some cases, even death. Mephedrone, imported from laboratories in China, is believed to have first entered Britain last year. By the summer, it was sweeping through clubs and parties throughout the country. Only now, though, are the dangers becoming apparent. Last December, 14-year-old Gabrielle Price died after taking a suspected drug cocktail including Mephedrone at a house party in Brighton. A friend who was there said Mephedrone was being taken by children as young as 11 who assumed it was safe because it's not illegal.

Mephedrone has already been banned in some European countries - including Norway, Sweden and Finland, where it has been linked with a string of deaths. The Home Office says it is also planning to make it illegal here. It is waiting for the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs - which is investigating Mephedrone as a 'top priority' - to report back early 2010. For the moment, however, the people trading in Mephedrone - legal drug dealers in all but name - are beyond the law. 'We have seen the effects it has on young people. Officers have been assaulted by those who are high on it and a number of people have collapsed in the street. One user took 36 hours to come down from his "high" and suffered from serious paranoia when he did.', said Inspector Kevin Tuck, County Durham.

Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/>

17th ECAD MAYORS' CONFERENCE  
FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT



CONFRONTING DRUG PROBLEMS —  
A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

WELCOME to MALTA and the Island of GOZO!

APRIL 22-23, 2010



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA & PEMBROKE LOCAL COUNCIL

## A better-targeted drug fight

US drug tsar Gil Kerlikovsky addressed the public on the eve of the holiday season:

“Despite significant progress in many areas -- overall drug use among high school seniors is down 43 percent since its peak in 1979 -- there are some troubling signals that are cause for concern.

Among some segments of youth, the perceived harmfulness of using drugs, and disapproval of drug use, has been deteriorating. History shows that this kind of softening of attitudes is often a precursor to increased rates of drug use.

In Florida, three-quarters of sixth graders see a great risk associated with regular marijuana use. However, by the time students reach 12th grade, only 45.5 percent indicate regular marijuana use poses a great risk of harm, according to the 2008 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey. Between sixth and 12th grade, disapproval of alcohol use declines 45.8 percentage points; disapproval of cigarette use declines 34.3 percentage points and disapproval of marijuana use declines 31.1 percentage points.

More than one million adolescents (12-17) and 2.7 million young adults (18-25) needed treatment for an illicit drug problem in 2008. Only about 11 percent of these received treatment at a specialty facility.

As these numbers show, patterns of illicit drug use change over time, and constant reevaluation and refinement are required to ensure federal, state and local programs are aimed at addressing current and future challenges, rather than those of the past.

The Obama administration is conducting just that kind of evaluation and will unveil a comprehensive and balanced National Drug Control strategy early next year. With the help of parents, community groups, schools, law enforcement and youth, we believe we can identify and implement new strategies that will allow us to adapt to changing circumstances, now and in the future.

Despite what parents might think, teens do value their advice and involvement. Parents can help guide and protect their children by talking with their kids about the harms of all drug abuse, by setting and enforcing rules that reduce the likelihood that teens will engage in risky behaviors and by keeping all medications in a place inaccessible to teens.

National Anti-Drug Media Campaign targets youth and parents with advertising and educational materials about the dangers of drug abuse. Statistics show that this can work, with the prevalence of past-month drug use significantly lower among young people who have seen or heard prevention messages from sources outside schools.

The Campaign's web site, [theantidrug.com](http://theantidrug.com), also offers important resources for parents and those interested in combating illicit drug use in their families and communities”.

*/Source: www.actnow.nu*

## Happy New Year!

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There is no doubt that drugs lead to gigantic problems in our cities, human suffering, enormous expenses and nuisance. Knowing this, we simply choose to act.

Being a member of ECAD is a statement you actually make, that is to deal with the drug problem. Methods or models used are of less importance, as long as they are knowledge-based. Some member cities have got very good prevention work; others have not. Some members are very engaged in giving professional treatment to abusers, which actually helps them being free from drugs; others are less engaged. How much cities prioritise our task differs a lot. To get as many cities acting against this problem as possible is, as I see it, ECAD's biggest challenge.

I do hope that in 2010 we will get ECAD's Advisory Network in function. This will help us in many ways, one of them is getting the issue higher up on the political agenda. Another contribution from the Advisory Network would be more interesting and better prepared conferences in the future.

ECAD plan to have four conferences a year and we will of course send out invitations for these occasions, but make it a habit to regularly check out ECAD's website for news on this and other issues. We will make sure the website is informative, easier to use and a day-to-day instrument for you during 2010. You could still help us by giving comments on what you miss or send us your suggestions.

As you notice, I have some hopes and expectations for 2010, some of them are mentioned above. Last but not least, I hope that you will all have a really fruitful and happy new year!

*/Jörgen Soidén, ECAD Director*



ECAD is Europe's leading organization promoting a drug free Europe and representing millions of European citizens. ECAD member cities work to develop initiatives against drug abuse supporting the United Nations Conventions.

**Has your city joined ECAD?**

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