

## EDITORIAL COMMENTARY

# Türkiye's Medical Cannabis Law: Progress with Pitfalls

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## A Decade-Long Vision

In 2013, Ege University submitted a proposal to the Turkish Ministry of Health titled Medical Cannabis Implementation Project. The Ministry's response confirmed the feasibility of the initiative, identifying Ege University's Faculty of Agriculture as a suitable institution for species identification and seed development. Although the proposal lacked a detailed implementation roadmap, it was endorsed as applicable by the General Directorate of Plant Production. Twelve years later, Türkiye has enacted legislation that echoes many of the principles proposed in that project. However, while this policy shift is encouraging, it presents substantial challenges requiring close scrutiny.

## Legislative Developments: Clarifying the Scope

In Türkiye, permission for cannabis cultivation for the purpose of producing active pharmaceutical ingredients has been in effect under existing legislation. The regulation issued on September 13, 2024, strengthened this framework by introducing detailed control mechanisms. Subsequently, Law No. 7557, published in the Official Gazette on July 24, 2025, expanded the scope of cannabis cultivation to include the production of medical products, health products, personal care products, and supportive products. This amendment builds upon existing legal foundations and does not imply the legalization of recreational use. It is therefore essential to correct misleading headlines—particularly in international media—that suggest Türkiye has legalized cannabis in general.

## Scientific Promise and Clinical Potential

For patients with treatment-resistant conditions, the law offers new therapeutic possibilities.

Cannabidiol (CBD), a phytocannabinoid, one of the identified cannabinoids in Cannabis, has shown promise in managing seizures and chronic neuropathic pain. A recent review found moderate evidence for cannabinoids in epilepsy and spasticity, though broader therapeutic benefits remain limited (Hoch, 2024). Restricting sales to licensed pharmacies and monitoring products through the National Pharmaceutical Tracking System (ITS) reflects responsible policy design. Türkiye's existing hemp cultivation infrastructure could position the country as a regional center for cannabinoid-based pharmaceutical research—provided academic and industrial partnerships are cultivated with care.

## Scientific Safeguards Before Implementation

The Green Crescent Scientific Committee recommends that regulatory changes be structured in a way that protects public health. This includes:

- Active involvement of interdisciplinary scientific committees in the drafting process
- Establishment of clear dosage protocols for distribution
- Development of evidence-based early warning systems to monitor psychiatric interactions and addiction risks
- Accurate public communication that clearly distinguishes medical use from recreational use

These integrated safeguards are essential to ensure responsible implementation and to prevent misuse or misinterpretation.

## Scientific and Regulatory Gaps

Despite its promise, the legislation presents notable challenges:

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- **Scientific Uncertainty:** The Turkish Medical Association has raised concerns about the lack of randomized controlled trials supporting many cannabis-based therapies. International observational studies report improved quality of life but limited impact on pain outcomes (Arkell, 2023). Mental health and addiction-related applications remain under-researched (Wilson, 2025).
- **Public Misunderstanding:** Even low-THC products can pose risks—particularly to adolescents, individuals with psychiatric vulnerabilities, or those predisposed to substance use disorders. Clear differentiation between medical and recreational use is essential.
- **Regulatory Ambiguity:** Key implementation questions remain unresolved:
  - Which conditions qualify for treatment?
  - What are the standards for physician training and prescription?
  - How will adverse events and misuse be monitored?

### Ethical Balance

As the medical cannabis sector expands, ethical concerns intensify. Commercial interests must not override patient-centered care, and punitive clauses must not disproportionately affect marginalized communities. Regulatory frameworks must uphold both accountability and compassion—ensuring vulnerable groups are not further stigmatized or exploited.

### Conclusion: Compassion Must Not Eclipse Caution

Türkiye's medical cannabis law is a significant reform—but not a final destination. Its success depends on prioritizing scientific evidence, transparent regulation, and public education. The law's potential must not be overshadowed by premature implementation or unchecked commercial expansion. As someone who advocated for this reform over a decade ago, I welcome its arrival. But its future depends on ensuring that compassion does not eclipse caution—and that innovation is firmly grounded in integrity.

### References

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