

# The Cannabis Manifesto— A New Paradigm of Wellness

by Steve DeAngelo

**The founder and CEO of the controversial Harborside Health Center draws on his experience serving the sick and a lifetime of working for social justice to present a compelling call for the legalization of this most controversial of plants.**



Like the Walls of Jericho, all around the world cannabis laws are tumbling down. More and more people are using cannabis, and using it more openly, but there is still a great deal of confusion about the plant and the role it should play in our lives—even in the minds of those who consume it regularly, and embrace it enthusiastically.

Some see cannabis as an intoxicant with varying levels of danger; other people view the plant as a medicine and some believe it to be a spiritual sacrament.

After a decade of directly serving and caring for medical cannabis patients, I've come to think of it as a wellness product.

Over time, many of my patients have confided in me that they appreciate the protection of California's medical cannabis law, but don't really consider themselves sick or injured. They typically say, "I just like to get high." When they say this, I start asking questions: When do you consume cannabis, and why? What are the specific effects you seek from it, and how has it made your life different?

I usually get an answer something like this:

*"Without cannabis, I'd get home feeling irritated from a long day at work, a hassle with a boss or a co-worker, a hot rush-hour commute, whatever. My back might be aching, and I wouldn't feel like playing with my kids or talking to my wife. I'd often have a sour stomach and not much appetite. Dinner wasn't very appealing*

*and sometimes gave me heartburn or indigestion. After dozing off in front of the TV, I'd wake up and sometimes not be able to go back to sleep. In the morning I could be tired, and not feel like going to work or doing much of anything. With cannabis, everything is different. I'm happy to see my family and have as much fun playing with my kids as they do. I forget about my aching back, and reuniting with my wife is a pleasure, not a chore. Dinner smells and tastes great, and I never have a problem with digestion. After dinner, the wife and I put the kids to bed, and then we have some extra special intimate time together. I curl up next to her, sleep soundly till morning, and wake up refreshed and ready for the new day. Cannabis makes my life a lot better, but I'm not sick and I wouldn't die or end up in the hospital without it. I'm not a patient; I just like to get high."*

After several years of hearing similar stories, it occurred to me that the same description of symptoms presented to the average American doctor would likely result in a diagnosis of anxiety, arthritis, acid reflux, low testosterone, insomnia, and depression. No reason to worry though, relief would be close at hand—a parade of ads for pharmaceuticals that supposedly treat these conditions marches out of televisions across the USA every night. The problem is that most of these pharmaceuticals are fantastically expensive, of dubious efficacy, and have a list of side effects that sound like something out of a Stephen King novel.

For most people, cannabis is a better alternative. In the mid 1990s scientists discovered that the human body endogenously produces its own cannabinoids. The system that regulates these cannabinoids - The Endocannabinoid System - is present in not only the brain, but all organs, and throughout the skin and connective tissue. This system may be the largest neurotransmitter system in the human body. The system's purpose: to preserve and restore homeostasis.<sup>1</sup>

Discovery of the Endocannabinoid System provides a solid scientific explanation for cannabis efficacy on an incredible range of medical conditions. In a sane world, the finding would have immediately ended debate about whether or not cannabis is good medicine.

Unfortunately, we're not there yet. Despite multiple studies that have proven cannabis actually fights cancer, the National Institute on Drug Abuse in the United States funded a study in 2006, intending to show that cannabis use causes lung cancer. Dr. Donald Tashkin



## MEET THE AUTHOR

STEVE DeANGELO is author of the new book *The Cannabis Manifesto*. He has been a cannabis activist, advocate, entrepreneur, and educator for almost four decades. His creation of the landmark Harborside Health Center, the largest medical marijuana dispensary in the world, set the standard for providing safe access, responsible use, and lab-tested, high quality medicine.

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was commissioned for the study, but he too, like many before him, found that cannabis actually fights the disease. Tashkin's findings were confirmed by Harvard scientists in 2007 who found that the cannabinoid THC could shrink cancerous tumors to half their size and slow progress of the disease.

The way cannabis fights cancer is more elegant than traditional cancer treatments such as radiation and surgery. The essence of the disease is uncontrolled cell growth—THC, CBD, and other cannabinoids trigger the death of cancer cells with a simultaneous two-front assault. The advance guard directly attacks the tumor by activating the receptors of the endocannabinoid system to induce apoptosis, the natural process of cell death, which is interrupted by cancer. Meanwhile, the outlying troops block angiogenesis, the process by which tumors acquire the blood vessels they need to continue growing. The tumors disintegrate from within, while being deprived of the blood they would need to propagate further; all of this occurs without damage to healthy tissue or horrifying side effects. The higher the dose of cannabis, the more effective it appears to be. But that's not all.<sup>2</sup>

Cannabis also prevents the development of cancer in the first place, and inhibits its spread. THC and other cannabinoids have been found to

are frequently overlooked, or mistakenly characterized, as “getting high.” Benefits can include the ability to spark creativity, extend patience and promote self-examination; to awaken a sense of wonder and playfulness, an openness to spiritual experience; the ability to enhance the flavor of a meal, the sound of music, or the sensitivity of a lover's touch; to open the mind; to bring poetry to language and spontaneity to a performer; to catalyze laughter, facilitate friendship, and bridge human differences.


These are not the attributes of an “intoxicant,” which is defined by Merriam-Webster's dictionary as a substance that can “excite or stupefy... to the point where physical and mental control is markedly diminished.” These are attributes of a wellness product that enhances and facilitates some of the most meaningful parts of the human experience.

A quick look at the World Health Organization's definition of the word wellness demonstrates a better description for the effects of cannabis: “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being...”

With discovery of the Endocannabinoid system, the ability of the plant to cure and to prevent and alleviate physical and mental distress is beyond question. The most recent social science research confirms what reform

cannabis reform movement were born at the same time.

Happening almost simultaneously, the rise of the internet and the rise of the cannabis reform movement are also not a coincidence. A global population with the ability to immediately access accurate and reliable information is less easily fooled, and more able to take corrective political action. Over 22,000 scientific studies have been published about cannabis thus far; the vast majority refute the idea that cannabis is a dangerous substance that should be criminalized, and a huge number of them provide conclusive evidence of its therapeutic potential.<sup>4</sup>

Millions of people worldwide have now read this research and experienced cannabis firsthand. We understand it is not a dangerous substance that should be criminalized, or even a relatively minor harm that should be tolerated. Cannabis is in fact a profound benefit that should and will be promoted. Our memories are not short; our minds are not dimmed by ignorance or stigma—we will not stop and will not rest until the travesty of cannabis prohibition is ended forever. 

## “Discovery of the Endocannabinoid System provides a solid scientific explanation for cannabis efficacy on an incredible range of medical conditions.”

prevent the reproduction, migration, and invasion of several types of cancer cells, including breast cancer, cervical cancer, oral cancer, neck cancer, head cancer, and bile-duct cancer. It appears to accomplish this feat primarily by blocking replication of cancer-causing viruses, like the gammaherpesvirus. The potent anti-inflammatory properties of cannabis may also help prevent cancer by maintaining healthy cell growth, DNA growth, and other physiological processes.<sup>3</sup>

Cannabis goes beyond the classic idea of medicine, having a wide range of more unique benefits that

activists have said for years: cannabis legalization will have a positive effect on social well-being. Statistics from the first twenty US states that legalized medical cannabis, confirm that rates of violent crime, traffic fatalities, prescription drug overdoses, and youth suicides drop dramatically once cannabis is made more accessible.

People who consume cannabis drink less alcohol and take fewer painkillers. People are more patient, gentle, and far less prone to violence and recklessness. Observed as having more respect of nature, it is no coincidence that the environmental movement and the

1) P.G Fine and M.J Rosenfeld (Oct. 2014), “Cannabinoids for neuropathic pain,” *Curr Pain Headache Rep* 18 (10): 451. Doi: 10.1007/s11916-014-0451-2. And California Society of Addiction Medicine; [www.csam-asam.org/introduction-csams-evidence-based-information-cannabismarijuana-timmen-cermak-md](http://www.csam-asam.org/introduction-csams-evidence-based-information-cannabismarijuana-timmen-cermak-md).

2) Werner, Marijuana, Gateway to Health, 25–26, 28–29.

3) Werner, Marijuana, Gateway to Health, 26.

4) [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/gquery/?term=marijuana](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/gquery/?term=marijuana) and Paul Armentano, “Emerging Clinical Applications For Cannabis & Cannabinoids: A Review of the Recent Scientific Literature, 2000 — 2015”, [norml.org/component/zoo/category/recent-research-on-medical-marijuana](http://norml.org/component/zoo/category/recent-research-on-medical-marijuana).

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