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AMA joins South Dakota physicians to urge “NO” vote on Constitutional Amendment A and Initiated Measure 26

SIOUX FALLS - The American Medical Association (AMA) and South Dakota State Medical Association (SDSMA) are urging South Dakotans to vote “NO” on Constitutional Amendment A and “NO” on Initiated Measure 26 this November. Constitutional Amendment A would legalize the recreational use of cannabis, and Initiated Measure 26 provides for the legalization of cannabis for medicinal use. The AMA opposes legalization of cannabis through ballot initiatives, in part, because of the risks of unintentional exposure in children, and increased frequency of use in adolescents, pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding.

Early data from jurisdictions that have legalized cannabis demonstrate concerns particularly around unintentional pediatric exposures resulting in increased calls to poison control centers and emergency department visits, as well as an increase in traffic crashes and deaths due to cannabis-related impaired driving and increased adolescent use in states where adult use was legalized. While states have seen an increase in revenue through sales and excise taxes on retail cannabis, the administrative and enforcement costs, as well as the costs to society, in terms of public health and safety should not be minimized.

“Legalizing cannabis at the ballot box for an unproven drug is the wrong approach,” said AMA President Susan R. Bailey, M.D. “Early data from jurisdictions that have legalized cannabis are concerning, particularly around unintentional pediatric exposures that have resulted in increased calls to poison control centers and emergency department visits, as well as an increase in traffic deaths due to cannabis-related impaired driving.”

“The South Dakota State Medical Association does not believe legalization is in the best interest of the patients we care for,” said Benjamin C. Aaker, M.D., SDSMA president. “There is evidence-based linkage between smoking marijuana and health issues. Marijuana isn’t an FDA-approved drug and should be subject to the same rigorous approval process as other prescribed medications. It isn’t right to circumvent this process – a process that has worked for decades – and bypassing the process is not safe.”

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