

NACo HEALTH STEERING COMMITTEE
PROPOSED RESOLUTION TO SUPPORT FEDERAL ACTION TO OBTAIN BETTER RESEARCH ON KRATOM AND TO PROMOTE DISSEMINATION OF BEST PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTICES RELATED TO KRATOM

Issue: This Resolution calls on NACo to support federal legislative and agency efforts to pursue better data and research related to kratom and to promote the dissemination of best public health practices related to the use of kratom in communities across the United States.

Proposed Policy: NACo should urge Congress to pass legislation and/or federal agency directives to fund and support efforts to research the health impacts related to the use of kratom. This includes federal action steps to devote the appropriate agency and staff resources to complete both: (1) a review of existing research on kratom in order to provide counties and other local government jurisdictions with immediate guidance on the most appropriate public health best practices related to kratom, no later than January 1, 2021; and (2) to pursue more comprehensive research on kratom that can inform longer term public health approaches related to the use of kratom.

Background: A public health professor from Syracuse University (Dessa Bergen-Cico) published an article in U.S. News and World Report on March 15, 2019, summarizing the emergence of kratom use in the United States and the current understanding of kratom's possible health risks.

Kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*) is an extract of a plant from Southeast Asia. Kratom is categorized as a novel psychoactive substance (NPS) because unlike virtually any other psychoactive compound, it can be both a central nervous system stimulant and depressant, depending on the dosage. At low doses of less than 5 grams it is a stimulant; at doses above 5 grams it produces depressant and analgesic effects like an opioid. It is sold as a powder in capsules, as a liquid concentrate, and can be infused into chocolates.

The Food and Drug Administration considers kratom to be a new dietary ingredient without established safety guidelines for dietary use. It is not yet regulated as a drug, though in 2018 the FDA found scientific evidence of the presence of opioid compounds in kratom, underscoring its potential for abuse as well as its potential to be used as an opioid type medication. A recent CDC study suggests that kratom might be dangerous, especially when used with other drugs. The analysis found that there were 152 drug overdose deaths from July 2016 to June 2017 in which the deceased tested positive for kratom. Of these deaths, kratom was listed as a cause of death for 91 people, including seven who tested positive for no other substance, although researchers cautioned that "the presence of additional substances cannot be ruled out."

Some research suggests kratom is an effective means of pain management -- proponents use it to manage post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety -- and some use it to help manage symptoms of withdrawal from heroin and prescription opioids. If it is being used in these ways, then it appears that kratom should be managed under the same protections used for other plant based medical treatments, like cannabis. There have been reported instances in which newborn babies went through withdrawal associated with maternal use during pregnancy, and infants exposed to kratom through breast milk.

Currently Kratom is legal in all but six states - Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Tennessee, Vermont, and Wisconsin. In the states where it is legal, it is often sold as a dietary supplement. There is a need for well-controlled research to better understand the effects of kratom on humans, to determine if there are legitimate medical uses for kratom and to establish safe dosing guidelines.

Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact: Counties are directly connected to the health impacts of kratom use. This is especially true related to any possible connections to kratom and opioids and could consist of positive or negative health impacts. Kratom use is becoming increasingly prevalent in both rural and urban areas of the United States and the financial implications of kratom are largely unknown in terms of health outcomes for individuals and needed public health best practices.

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