



Kenya Medical Association

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

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Kenya Medical Association Position on Khat and Muguka

The Kenya Medical Association (KMA), the umbrella professional association for doctors in Kenya, has a twin mandate: to champion the welfare of doctors and to advocate for the highest standard of quality healthcare in the country.

Khat and Muguka are plants native to East Africa, traditionally chewed in social settings, especially by men, for thousands of years. Usage statistics indicate that lifetime use of khat is highest in the former Eastern (14.6%), Coast (9%), and Northeastern (8%) provinces. Muguka usage is most prevalent in the Coast (10%), Northeastern (5%), and Eastern (4%) regions of Kenya. Despite the increasing use of both khat and Muguka, public awareness of their effects remains low.

Both Muguka and khat contain psychoactive substances that stimulate the central nervous system, leading to increased alertness, concentration, energy, and euphoria. However, these substances also pose significant health risks, including mental health disturbances, altered perceptions of reality, hypertension, erectile dysfunction, and other long-term effects. A 2010 ISCD study ranked khat as the 17th most dangerous drug, considering dependence, physical harm, and social harm among 20 popular recreational drugs.

The unregulated use of these substances has significant public health effects. Khat and Muguka users often consume other recreational drugs, including alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana, resulting in harmful physical, mental, and psychological effects from poly-drug abuse. Typically consumed in groups, the environments for chewing sessions are often crowded, poorly ventilated, and unsanitary, increasing the risk of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and diarrheal diseases. Social dependence on these substances can lead to prolonged periods of use, resulting in addiction, neglect of social and occupational responsibilities, and subsequent psychological and socioeconomic challenges. Additionally, khat use adversely affects nutrition intake, maternal health, sexual health, and reproductive health, imposing an increased burden on public healthcare systems to address the resulting mental and physical repercussions.

Since 1980, the World Health Organization has labeled khat as a "drug of abuse" capable of causing psychological dependence. Many countries, including Morocco, South Africa, and Uganda, regulate or prohibit the consumption and distribution of khat. In contrast, Kenya currently permits the production, sale, and consumption of khat, where it holds cultural significance for some ethnic communities. However, the country lacks a comprehensive regulatory framework.

The Kenya Medical Association recommends the following:

President Dr. Simon Kigundu	Vice-President Dr. Ibrahim Matende	Secretary-General Dr. Diana Marion	Assistant Secretary-General Dr. Elizabeth Gitau	Treasurer-General Dr. Lyndah Kemunto
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1. The Ministry of Health should use the primary healthcare networks to address khat, Muguka, and substance abuse through surveillance, education, cessation support, and mental health services, focusing on community reintegration after rehabilitation.
2. Kenya Medical Association is ready to work with the national and local governments to support legislation and regulation of the distribution and use of khat and Muguka, considering their classification as Class C substances, including controls on beverages derived from these plants.
3. National and local research agencies to conduct research to generate evidence in order to increase understanding of the proliferation of muguka use and to find out the concentration levels of cathinone and cathine found in Muguka that is grown in different parts of the country. This will support product standardization if licensed packaging and distribution of Muguka products is introduced in the country.
4. The Ministry of Health through the CHP program should expand the curriculum to incorporate a substance use and abuse component and to collaborate with leaders among communities where Muguka use is popular to encourage better hygiene practices in gathering places and additionally create a platform for open discussion and education on the dangers of Muguka.
5. The Ministry of Education in collaboration with Ministry of Health and other public health stakeholders should develop age-appropriate educational materials about the dangers of khat/muguka and disseminate these materials in schools as part of national anti-drug abuse campaigns.



DR. DIANA MARION
SECRETARY GENERAL

KENYA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

- KMA Public Health Committee
- KMA Policy & Advocacy Committee