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ICYMI: *USA Today* and *New York Post* Spotlight Kratom Industry Dangers — While FDA Targets the Alternative, 7-OH

WASHINGTON, DC – Two major national news outlets — *USA Today* and the *New York Post* — published scathing new reports this week exposing the growing public health crisis fueled by kratom and its unregulated derivatives. Together, the stories reveal a disturbing pattern: while everyday Americans fall victim to addiction, withdrawal, and predatory marketing, federal officials are refusing to go after the actual source of danger, instead targeting **7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH)**, an industry competitor that the FDA’s own databases have shown to have far fewer adverse events.

[New York Post: “Feel Free” Drink Leaving Addiction and Despair in Its Wake](#)

A brutal exposé from the *New York Post* details how Botanic Tonics’ “Feel Free” drink — a mix of kratom and kava sold at gas stations — is addicting thousands under the guise of wellness. Backed by paid influencers and podcasts, the drink has caused serious financial, emotional, and physical harm.

“At the absolute worst, like 12 bottles a day,” one woman admitted. “I was spending easily \$3,000 a month.”

“I was lethargic, depressed, anxious, barely able to get out of bed,” she said. “I was throwing up from the kratom, and the kava made my skin dry — literal flakes of skin just flying off.”

Another user, struggling to quit, shared: “Looking back and talking about it now, it’s just like, why haven’t I seized a lot of opportunities in my life? And I can point it all back to kratom and kava.”

And perhaps most disturbing: “A 14-year-old came up to me at a gas station and begged me to buy him a Feel Free. People act like they have heroin addictions over this little drink.”

[Read the full New York Post article here](#)

[USA Today: FDA’s Backward Focus — Attacking 7-OH, Ignoring Big Kratom](#)

Meanwhile, *USA Today* reports that the FDA is **moving to ban 7-OH**, a compound derived from kratom that – per FDA adverse event data – **poses significantly less risk**, has **no record of the same public harm**, and is already being produced with far greater transparency and oversight.

Rather than confronting the sprawling, unregulated kratom industry, officials appear to be scapegoating 7-OH, a compound with the potential to bring **consistency** to a chaotic market.

[Read the USA Today article here](#)

HART's National Policy Director Jeff Smith responded to these articles:

"While the FDA is prematurely pushing for a ban of 7-OH, products made by the HHS Secretary's friend JW Ross' firm are severely harming users. Conversely, the FDA's *own database* shows that 7-OH has a strong safety profile.

"Recent actions undertaken by the FDA and HHS appear to be based on guidance from Dr. Chris McCurdy, a scientist whose work has been repeatedly [funded by JW Ross and Big Kratom](#). Dr. McCurdy is a paid combatant in an intra-industry turf war; his opinions, including that 7-OH is a full opioid agonist, contrast sharply with those of many other experienced scientists.



Secretary Kennedy with his friend and
Botanic Tonics Founder JW Ross

“Others are also paid by Big Kratom to parrot their views. Indeed, one kratom exec recently [admitted to paying Astroturf protesters](#) at a conference after failing to mobilize any actual consumer opposition to 7-OH. And the consumer trotted out to ‘prove’ 7-OH’s harm last week – who admitted she’d never taken 7-OH but was instead relying on third-hand gossip heard at a vape shop – is also a longtime Big Kratom shill. The pattern is unmistakable.

“Instead of pushing to schedule 7-OH and having his staff members falsely declare it as a ‘killer’, Secretary Kennedy should be joining with HART and supporting smart, science-based regulations for both Kratom and 7-OH products. If he is going to ‘Make America Healthy Again,’ the Secretary must disregard his rich friend’s lobbying and instead do right by the millions of consumers of both Kratom and 7-OH.”

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About HART:

The Holistic Alternative Recovery Trust (HART) is a national nonprofit organization advocating for science-based policy, regulatory transparency, and access to safe, plant-based alternatives. 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), a metabolite of mitragynine, the most abundant alkaloid found in kratom, is a new tool being used to improve public health. HART strongly supports robust regulation to mandate that all 7-OH products are manufactured safely, are marketed transparently, and are kept out of the hands of children. Learn more at hartsupporter.com.