



**MEDICINAL  
CANNABIS**  

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## **Submission on inquiry into the Public Health (Medicinal Cannabis) Bill 2016**

Dear committee members

Medicinal Cannabis Australia is pleased to provide comments to the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee.

The medicinal use of cannabis was prohibited in Australia approximately 80 years ago. Before this time cannabis was a common ingredient in much of the prescribed medicine commonly used in this country. As it was removed from Australia's pharmacopoeia it was also removed from the memories of doctors and patients alike in favour of synthetic drugs. Traditionally medicine was obtained through extraction from medicinal plants. Once again, in the last decade the benefits of traditional cannabinoid pharmacology has undergone a rapid emergence. Opening up a wide range of exciting possibilities.

Presently the unauthorised use of cannabis as a medicine in Australia is wide spread. As Australian's learn about the benefits people are achieving in countries such as Canada, Israel, Europe and America. Australians are also learning how to treat themselves with the use of cannabis for the relief of pain and disease. There is a significant demand for cannabis medicine in this country, and with no legal source of supply the void is being filled by a network of backyard suppliers. As knowledge grows, the demand grows. The potential benefits of cannabis may have been overlooked in this country by both government and medical officials, but not by people educating themselves through the World Wide Web.

### **Prescribing cannabis**

There will be a necessity to educate doctors as well as patients as to the benefits and side effects of medicinal cannabis as a safe and effective treatment for many illnesses. With the recent discovery of the endocannabinoid system in the early 1990s, many practitioners will be unaware of how cannabis interacts within our body and therefore will find difficulties in assessing when cannabis would be beneficial to their patient and what dosage and method to prescribe.



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The prescriber can be a patient's own doctor, or when their medical condition is confirmed by their family doctor, an alternative option may be a medicinal cannabis trained professional.

During the consultation, a summary of the medications that are currently prescribed to the patient would need to be reviewed for contraindications. For example, a person may not have the long term need to continue blood pressure medication, as cannabis may also regulate their blood pressure.

Another example of medicinal cannabis removing the need of additional medications may be for cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy and radiation. Medicinal cannabis may assist a patient who is suffering from:

1. Nausea
2. Depression
3. Loss of appetite
4. Pain
5. Insomnia

All of which are common symptoms of cancer and chemotherapy. Medicinal cannabis may be able to replace five different drugs with the use of only one.

## **Dispensing cannabis**

Unless there is a legal medicinal cannabis source/supply available for the wide range of cannabis treatable conditions, Australians will be forced to cultivate their own or buy off the black market.

There are over eighty cannabinoids as well as terpenes and flavonoids in cannabis plants. It is the combination of these that synergistically play a role in the healing of health related issues.

Cannabis strains range from pure sativa's to pure indica's as well as hybrid strains consisting of both indica and sativa traits. Because different strains have very different medicinal benefits and effects, certain strains can be targeted to better treat specific illnesses. Hence, a detailed knowledge of cannabis is deeply warranted.

**Indica** dominant cannabis strains tend to have a very relaxing effect that is helpful in treating general anxiety and sleeping disorders. They are very effective for overall pain relief. Indica based medicines are most commonly used by patients in the late evening or even right before bed due to how sleepy and relaxed you may become.



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Benefits Indica may provide:

1. Relieves body pain
2. Relaxes muscles
3. Relieves spasms, reduces seizures
4. Relieves headaches and migraines
5. Relieves anxiety or stress

**Sativa** dominant cannabis strains tend to have a more uplifting, energetic and “cerebral” high that is best suited for daytime medication.

Benefits Sativa may provide:

1. Feelings of well-being and at-ease
2. Up-lifting and cerebral thoughts
3. Stimulates and energizes
4. Increases focus and creativity
5. Fights depression

**High CBD low THC** strains. CBD is the abbreviation for cannabidiol. Cannabidiol is second only in average volume when compared to THC (tetrahydrocannabinol). There’s been some interesting recent research that has demonstrated that CBD has analgesic, anti-inflammatory and anti-anxiety properties. The great news about cannabidiol is that it has these properties without the psychoactive effects.

Uses for high CBD/ Low THC:

1. Crohn’s disease
2. PTSD
3. Multiple sclerosis
4. Dravet’s Syndrome

Learning how each strain of cannabis might affect a patient can go a long way towards utilizing the plant’s therapeutic benefits. In an attempt to help new patients determine what strain is right for them, trained professionals specialising in cannabis medicine would be advisable to assist on what particular cannabis medicine would be best suited to treat a patients condition.

## Methods of medicinal cannabis consumption

The patient would need to be advised of the best suited method, or combination of methods to most effectively treat their particular condition. This would need to be completed after the initial doctors consultation confirming that they have a condition that can be treated with medicinal cannabis. Again, a trained professional specialising in



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cannabis medicine would best be suited for this role. If you don't understand the differences between the cannabis products then how can you effectively prescribe? Below is a brief explanation of how to consume cannabis medicine.

### **Vaporizing medical cannabis**

A vaporizer is a device that is able to extract the therapeutic ingredients in the cannabis plant material, called cannabinoids, as well as the beneficial terpenes at a much lower temperature than required for burning. This allows patients to inhale the active ingredients as a vapor instead of smoke, and spares them the irritating and harmful effects of smoking.

### **Edible medical cannabis**

Cannabis can be infused into butter or oil that is then cooked in food. It can also be infused into a tea. Edibles, as they are typically called, usually take longer to take effect than vaporizing, often 20 minutes to 2 hours or much more. The difference of THC being digested through the liver instead of the bloodstream makes this method more potent and changes the composition of the THC.

### **Topical medical cannabis**

Topical cannabis medicines are applied directly to the skin or muscles. They include lotions, salves, balms, sprays, oils, and creams. This generally has no psychoactive effect to the patient.

### **Tinctures**

A tincture is a concentrated form of medical cannabis in an alcohol solution. Tinctures are highly concentrated and require careful dosage levels, starting out small and waiting to feel the effects before adding more. They can be taken under the tongue or mixed into water or other beverages.

### **Cannabis essential oil**

Cannabis oil is a thick, sticky, fully extracted essential oil that has high concentrations of cannabinoid compounds such as THC and CBD. Dosing is similar to tinctures.

## **Example prescription process**

### **Does the patient qualify?**

- Does the patient suffer from one of the conditions that has been certified by a health care practitioner that can be treated with cannabis?
- Has the practitioner identified any contraindications that the patient may have?
- If the practitioner identifies the patient as suitable to be treated with cannabis medicine they are then registered for the medicinal cannabis program.



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### **Cannabis patient center**

- The patient or caregiver attends the center where they fill out a self-evaluation form. Together with their doctors paperwork stating their condition to be treated the patient is advised on some suitable strains of cannabis as well as education on methods of intake and dosage.
- The cannabis professional can provide information and education, which includes the effects of THC and CBD. They can also demonstrate how to use a vaporizer, or how to consume oil and tinctures.
- Each time the patient revisits the cannabis patient center a new evaluation form should be filled out to aid the cannabis professional on providing the patient with the best possible dosage and outcome for treatment.

## **Conclusion**

We know that some medical cannabis users have noticed that one cannabis strain in particular helps them more than others. This diversity offered by nature is impossible to reproduce from the pharmaceutical industry, which attempts to isolate the active ingredients in order to patent its synthetic reproduction. Pure THC causes very different effects than cannabis because it is missing all the terpenes, flavonoids and cannabinoids that modulate its effect.

Essentially, cannabis medicine should be supplied responsibly by understanding each customer/patient tolerance level and experienced usage together with any other current prescription drugs so that you can make a responsible choice when helping people select these products.

We need a standardized system that everybody's working from and as new information comes to hand it can be upgraded to the one platform. This will keep the industry updated and on the same page. They will all be using the same information whether they are prescribed in Brisbane or in Melbourne, so that patients and professionals receive national uniformity in education. As more diseases and ailments are allowed relief from cannabis medicine the cannabis patient centers can work closely with doctors to ensure the highest patient care and recovery.

It is our firm belief that Australians can benefit from medicinal cannabis as an alternative to, or in addition to mainstream medicine.

It is our goal to educate patients as to the benefits of medicinal cannabis as a safe and effective treatment for many illnesses.



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**The key areas of guidance are:**

- Safe ways to use medicinal cannabis to reduce symptoms and causes of illness.
- How to experience the benefits of cannabis with minimal side-effects.
- What are the best strains and delivery mechanisms of cannabis for the patient's particular condition?
- How the body's endocannabinoid system is involved in both treatment and healing.
- Approaches to find the right dose and delivery mechanisms of cannabis for each individual in order to achieve optimal healing benefits.

Yours sincerely

Heath Kratzer  
Director  
Medicinal Cannabis Australia  
24 June 2016