

## **MEDICINAL CANNABIS IN NSW POSITION STATEMENT January 2019**

### **BACKGROUND**

The use of cannabis as a therapy in disease and illness symptom relief is lengthy and controversial. In Western countries this extends at least as far back as the 1980s by people with HIV/AIDS. Anecdotal evidence has suggested that the use of the 'recreational' form of the drug can assist in increasing a person's desire to eat, as well as being effective in pain relief.

'Medicinal Cannabis' or 'Medical marijuana' refers to a variant of cannabis developed specifically for use by people with an illness or disease, where the psychoactive ingredient of recreational cannabis (THC) has been removed. The treatment may be in tablet or pill form, as a nasal or ingestible spray or in a form able to be rubbed into the skin. Provision of the treatment is generally under arrangements that are approved and provided by government, and has largely been in relation to cancer treatment (particularly chemotherapy) and in palliative care environments. People with cancer, their families, carers and friends have been instrumental in advocating for the adoption of medicinal cannabis in a number of overseas countries, other states in Australia, and in New South Wales. Cancer Voices NSW has participated in developments in the use of medicinal cannabis in NSW since at least 2013 (see note below).

Research has however presented a wide range of views as to the effectiveness of medicinal cannabis as a treatment for both cancer and non-cancer associated pain, and more broadly in treating and 'curing' disease. (See references). There are currently a significant number of clinical trials underway in NSW, some of which are supported by government funding under the management of the Centre for Medicinal Cannabis Research and Innovation, for patients with terminal cancer, and into chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, and for pain relief. These are taking place under the auspices of a number of universities and medical research institutions drawing on patients from a range of hospitals and treatment centres.

### **AIMS**

- The implementation of an accessible, cost-effective and equitable medicinal cannabis access service in New South Wales, following the outcomes of current clinical trials, and subsequent Government decisions
- Support for the continuation of current provisions in NSW for accessing medicinal cannabis through registration to prevent action by NSW Police for marijuana possession.

### **OBJECTIVES/STRATEGIES**

- I. Advocate to support patient choice in the use of medicinal cannabis as part of cancer treatment through the NSW compassionate access scheme
- II. Monitor developments in the clinical trials on the use of medicinal cannabis currently underway in NSW
- III. Support trials aimed at providing evidence of efficacy of chemotherapy-induced nausea, vomiting, pain relief, and in palliative care
- IV. Advocate to support equitable access to cannabinoid products that, as far as possible, are Australian-developed and approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration
- V. Support the introduction of any NSW Government-approved medicinal cannabis access service.

## ACTIONS

- Use opportunities such as letter writing, submissions and the CVN Newsletter to present the Cancer Voices NSW position in support of the use of medicinal cannabis as necessary to increase patient choice when determining their cancer treatment
- Use information sources, including media, written articles and research journals to ensure CVN's involvement in the medicinal cannabis issue is well informed, using current thinking and research
- Ensure CVN has current information as to the development of a medicinal cannabis service in NSW, using sources such as the NSW Cannabis Medicines Advisory Service.

## KEY RELATIONSHIPS

- Minister for Health; Shadow Minister for Health; NSW Greens
- NSW Health/NSW Cannabis Medicine Advisory Service
- The Centre for Medicinal Cannabis and Research and Innovation
- Australian Medical Association
- United in Compassion (through Cancer Voices Australia)

### Note:

Cancer Voices NSW's involvement in medicinal cannabis issues has included:

- a submission to the NSW Legislative Council inquiry (2013)
- letters to parliamentarians (state and federal)
- attendance at symposiums (Tamworth, November 2014; Sydney, May 2016) and meetings with health system decision makers
- support for the NSW Terminal Illness Cannabis Scheme (TICS)/Medicinal Cannabis Compassionate Use Scheme
- appearance at the Senate inquiry into draft legislation (with Lucy Haslam, United in Compassion), March 2015

## References

Louise Degenhart and Wayne D Hall, 'The adverse effects of cannabinoids: implications for use of medical marijuana', *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 17 June 2008 (accessed 12 October 2008)

'Doctors not convinced on medical cannabis', [www.sbs.com.au](http://www.sbs.com.au), 19 February 2018

David Robert Grimes, 'Does cannabis cure cancer?', *The Conversation*, 24 May 2018 (accessed 12 October 2018)

Gabrielle Campbell et al, 'Effect of cannabis use in people with chronic non-cancer pain prescribed opioids: findings from a 4-year prospective cohort study', *The Lancet online* (thelancet.com), Vol 3, July 2018

'A 4-year Australian study of 1500 people finds no evidence that cannabis helps to treat pain', *Business Insider Australia*, 3 July 2018

'Medical Cannabis', interview with Dr Anthony Bartone, Australian Medical Association, *ABC Radio National* transcript, 4 July 2018 (AMA Media Release) (accessed 9 October 2018)

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