



**Australian Government**  
**Australian Institute of  
Health and Welfare**

*Authoritative information and statistics  
to promote better health and wellbeing*

Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

### **Regulator of Medicinal Cannabis Bill 2014**

Dear Sir/Madam

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee consideration of the Regulator of Medicinal Cannabis Bill 2014. This submission highlights data available from AIHW that may be of relevance to this inquiry.

The AIHW is a major national agency set up by the Australian Government in 1987 as an independent corporate Commonwealth entity within the Health portfolio. Our mission is to provide authoritative information and statistics to promote better health and wellbeing. We provide timely, reliable and relevant information and statistics on hospitals and other health services, aged care, child care, services for people with disabilities, housing assistance, youth justice and other community services.

We collect data and manage national data collections in these areas, producing over 140 public reports each year. Our work is frequently referenced by the media. We also provide information to other government bodies and cross-jurisdictional councils, to external researchers and also directly back to data providers. We report in formats that suit their purposes and allow them to place their service provision in a wider context.

We also develop, maintain and promote data standards to ensure that data collected are nationally consistent. In all these activities we enable governments and the community to make better informed decisions to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians.

The *National Drug Strategy Household Survey detailed report: 2013* contains the latest data relating to Australians' use of cannabis as well as their attitudes and beliefs about cannabis use and policy. A list of relevant tables from this report is provided at [Appendix A](#). Data included in this report are drawn from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey.

#### **National Drug Strategy Household Survey**

The NDSHS is the leading survey of licit and illicit drug use in Australia. The 2013 survey was the 11th conducted under the auspices of the National Drug Strategy. Previous surveys were conducted in 1985, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2007 and 2010. The data collected through these surveys have contributed to the development of policies for Australia's response to drug-related issues.

In 2013, almost 24,000 people aged 12 years or older provided information on their drug use patterns, attitudes and behaviours. The 2013 NDSHS was designed to provide reliable estimates at the national and state level. The sample was based on households, so some

homeless and institutionalised people were not included in the survey (consistent with the approach in previous years).

Fieldwork for the 2013 NDSHS was completed in early-December 2013. First results were published July 2014, with a full report and online tables following in December 2014.

### **Other related collections**

A number of other collections managed by the AIHW may also be of interest to the committee. These include:

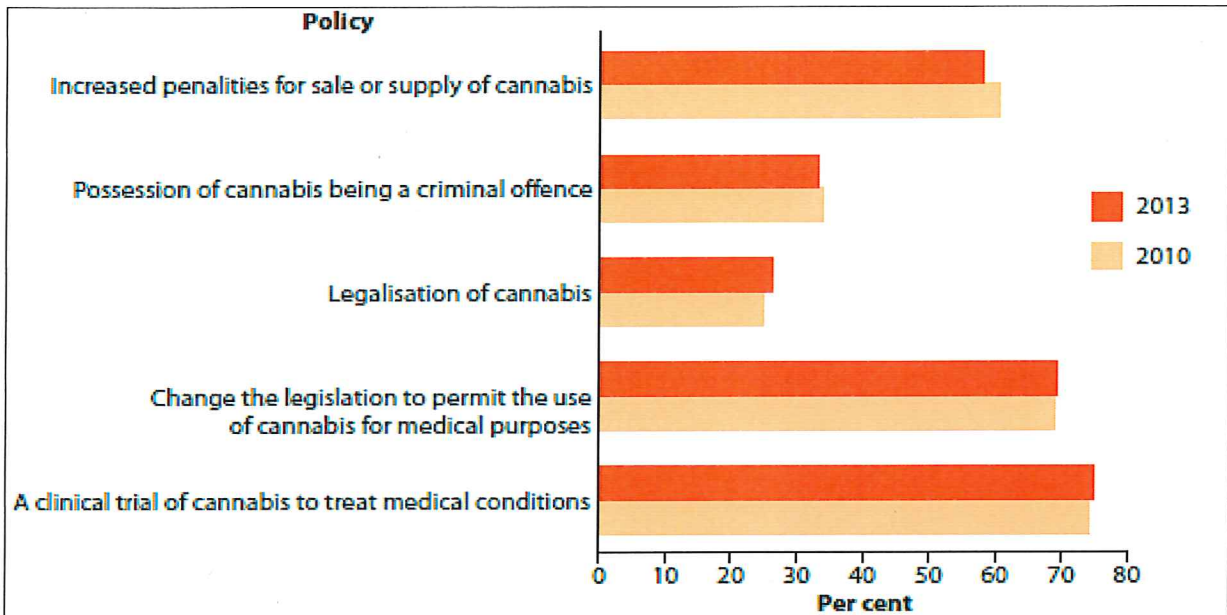
- The Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set, which is an annual administrative collection of data from publicly funded treatment services in all states and territories, including those directly funded by the Australian Government Department of Health (DoH). Included are all publicly funded government and non-government agencies that provide one or more specialist alcohol and/or other drug treatment services and all clients who have completed one or more treatment episodes at an alcohol and other drug treatment service. It contains data on clients and treatment episodes where cannabis was identified as a drug of concern.
- The National Hospital Morbidity Database which contains data on hospitalisation at almost all public and private hospitals across Australia. Data items of relevance include principal and additional diagnoses, treatments provided, Indigenous status and other patient demographics, and geographical location. Relevant diagnoses may include mental and behavioural disorders due to use of cannabis and evidence of cannabis involvement in hospitalisations for injury and poisoning.
- The National Prisoner Health Data Collection contains data on prisoners' use of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs in the 12 months before entry into prison and while in prison. Prison entrants are able to specify which illicit drugs they were using before they entered prison, including cannabis.
- The Specialist Homelessness Services collection contains information about clients of and services provided by specialist homelessness agencies. Data collected includes: client characteristics (including Indigenous status); reasons for seeking assistance (including drug and alcohol related reasons); and types of assistance required and provided (including drug and alcohol counselling and referrals for drug and alcohol treatment). This collection does not include information specific to cannabis use, only treatment for drugs in general.

### **Key findings drawn from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey**

#### *Support for measures relating to cannabis use*

Participants in the 2013 National Drug Strategy Household Survey were asked about their support for legalisation, penalties, use of cannabis in medicinal settings, and actions taken against people who use, sell, or supply cannabis.

Three-quarters (75%) of people aged 14 or older would support a clinical trial of cannabis to treat medical conditions (Figure 9.6). About two-thirds (69%) of people would also support a change to the legislation permitting the use of cannabis for medicinal purposes but only one-quarter (26%) believed that the personal use of cannabis should be legal. Even if cannabis were to be legalised, the great majority of the population (85%) claimed they would still not use it and 5.4% said they would try it ([Online Table 9.15 within Policy and attitudes tables](#)). While only one-third (33%) thought that possession of cannabis for personal use should be a criminal offence, 58% thought the penalties should be increased for the sale or supply of this drug.



Source: Online tables 9.13, 9.14, 9.18 and 9.20.

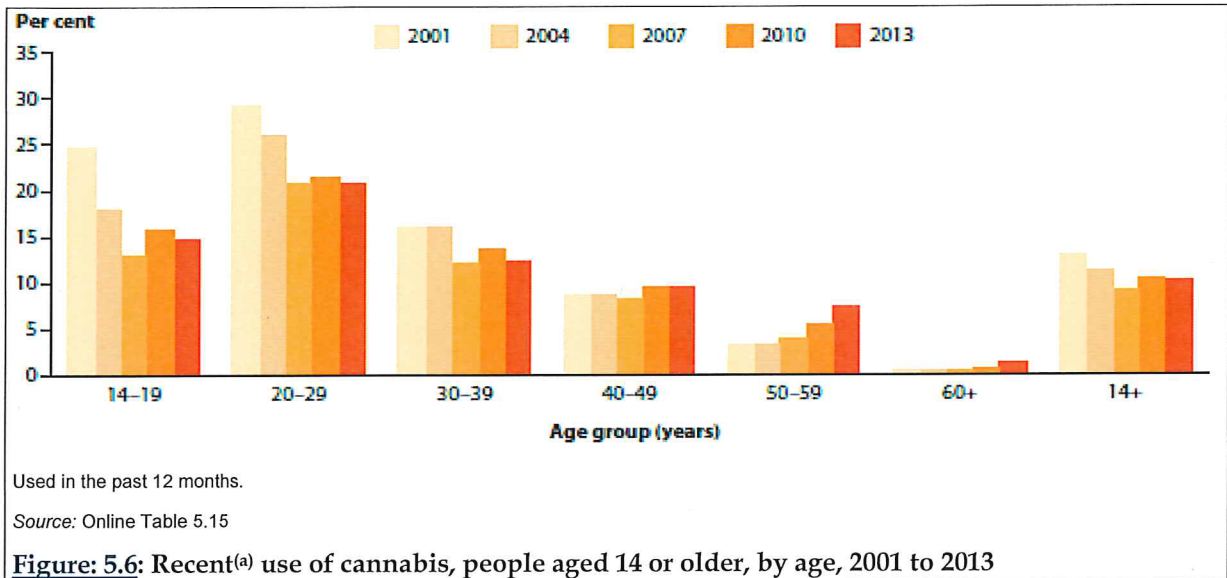
**Figure 9.6:** Support for measures relating to cannabis use, people aged 14 or older, 2010 and 2013

*Cannabis use trends*

In 2013, it was estimated that about 6.6 million (or 35%) people aged 14 or older had used cannabis in their lifetime and about 1.9 million (or 10.2%) had used cannabis in the previous 12 months ([Online Table 5.4 within Illicit drug tables](#)). Around 1 in 5 (21%) people aged 14 or older had been offered or had the opportunity to use cannabis in the previous 12 months ([Online Table 5.12](#)), and 1 in 10 (10.2%) reported that they did use cannabis in that time ([Online Table 5.7](#)). About 1 in 20 Australians (5.3%) had used in the month prior to the survey and 3.5% had used in the previous week. More specific information is provided below.

*Age comparisons over time*

Recent use of cannabis has remained relatively stable over the past decade but there were some significant changes among different age groups ([Online Table 5.15](#)). Since 2001, recent cannabis use has generally dropped in the younger age groups (those aged 14–39), but either increased or remained stable for the older age groups (40 or older).



Should the committee have any queries about the information I have provided or wish to seek additional data from the AIHW, please contact Mr Geoff Neideck, Head of the Housing and Specialised Services Group, on

Yours sincerely

Kerry Flanagan PSM  
Director (CEO)

|| March 2015

### Reference

AIHW 2014. National Drug Strategy Household Survey detailed report: 2013. Drug statistics series no. 28. Cat. no. PHE 183. Canberra: AIHW.

**Attachment A: List of online tables relevant to cannabis use, attitudes and policy support**  
Tables in Chapter 9 of the *National Drug Strategy Household Survey detailed report: 2013* can be found in the online [Policy and attitudes tables](#) spread sheet and those from Chapter 5 and supplementary to Chapter 5 can be found in the online [Illicit drug tables](#).

**Policy and attitudes**

Table 9.13	Support for measures relating to cannabis use in medical settings, people aged 14 or older, by sex, 2004 to 2013
Table 9.14	Support for the possession of cannabis being a criminal offence, people aged 14 years or older, by sex, 2010 to 2013
Table 9.15	Likely usage of cannabis if it was legalised, people aged 14 years or older, by sex, 2010 to 2013
Table 9.16	Likely usage of cannabis if it was legalised, people aged 14 years or older, by cannabis use status, 2010 to 2013
Table 9.17	Support for the possession of cannabis being a criminal offence, people aged 14 years or older, by age and sex, 2013
Table 9.18	Support for the legalisation of selected illicit drugs, people aged 14 or older, by sex, 2004 to 2013
Table 9.19	Support for the legalisation of selected illicit drugs, people aged 14 or older, by age and sex, 2013
Table 9.20	Support for increased penalties for the sale or supply of selected illicit drugs, people aged 14 or older, by sex, 2004 to 2013
Table 9.21	Support for increased penalties for the sale or supply of selected illicit drugs, people aged 14 or older, by age and sex, 2013
Table 9.22	Support for actions taken against people found in possession of selected illicit drugs for personal use, people aged 14 or older, by age, 2013
Table 9.23	Support for the legalisation of selected illicit drugs, people aged 14 or older, by use status of each drug specified, 2010 to 2013
Table 9.24	Support for increased penalties for the sale or supply of selected illicit drugs, people aged 14 or older, by use status of each drug specified, 2010 to 2013
Table 9.25	Support for actions taken against people found in possession of selected illicit drugs for personal use, people aged 14 or older, by use status for any drug, 2010 to 2013

**Illicit drugs**

Table 5.4	Summary of recent and lifetime illicit use of drugs, people aged 14 years or older, 2013
Table 5.15	Recent use of cannabis, people aged 14 years or older, by age and sex, 1995 to 2013
Table S5.1	Recent use of cannabis, people aged 14 years or older, by additional age groups and sex, 1995 to 2013
Table S5.2	Other drugs used with cannabis, recent cannabis users aged 14 years or older, by sex, 2013
Table S5.3	Form of cannabis used, recent users aged 14 years or older, by sex, 2007 to 2013
Table S5.4	Ever and recent cannabis use, people aged 14 years or older, by age and sex, 2013
Table S5.5	Ever and recent cannabis use, people aged 12 years or older, by age and sex, 2013
Table S5.6	Cannabis use, people aged 14 years or older, by social characteristics, 2007 to 2013
Table S5.7	Self-assessed health status, health conditions and psychological distress, by cannabis use, people aged 18 years or older, 2007 to 2013