

March 2015

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you to articulate my support and call on the Senate to support of the “Regulator of Medicinal Cannabis Bill 2014” relating to medical use of cannabis which was referred to the Committee on 12 February 2015.

First, it should be pointed out and emphasised that the bill is not proposing a general decriminalizing of cannabis use. The Bill simply proposes allowing access to medical cannabis in much the same way as access has been made for opiate derivatives such as morphine and codeine.

The opiate derivatives have an important role to play in medical applications and provide significant relief to very many Australians suffering from severe and disabling conditions. Medical cannabis can offer similar (and in many cases more effective) relief to people suffering from a wide range of conditions such as:

- **AIDS** - Marijuana can reduce the nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting from the condition itself and the medications as well.
- **Glaucoma** - Marijuana relieves the internal eye pressure of glaucoma, and therefore relieving the pain and slowing or even stopping the condition.
- **Cancer**- Many side effects of the medication to stop cancer can be relieve with Marijuana, some studies suggest that Marijuana tends to slow down the progress of some types of cancer.
- **Multiple Sclerosis** - Muscle pain, spasticity, tremors and unsteadiness are some of the effects caused by the disease that can be relieved by Marijuana.
- **Epilepsy** - in some patients, epileptic seizures can be prevented with Marijuana use.
- **Chronic pain** - Marijuana helps to alleviate the pain caused from many types of injuries and disorders.
- **Anxiety, Depression or Obsession** - Even though mild anxiety is a common side effect in some users, cannabis can elevate your mood and expand the mind

(See more at www.disabled-world.com/medical/pharmaceutical/marijuana).

The Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, in a letter to radio announcer Alan Jones, supported the use of medical cannabis. He said,

" I have no problem with the medical use of cannabis, just as I have no problem with the medical use of opiates. If a drug is needed for a valid medicinal purpose...and is being administered safely, there should be no question of its legality."

The President of the Australian Medical Association in its Press Release of 30 September 2014 has supported the use of medical cannabis. He said:

"There are some areas where we know that cannabinoids as a pharmaceutical preparation have already been approved, but there are other areas, such as epilepsy, where there are large clinical trials underway in the United States, and so we probably need to wait for some of those trials to come through," he said. "While I think proponents of the move to decriminalise marijuana point to various trials, I think the validity of some of those trials varies."

He said the efficacy of medical cannabis for treating symptoms of multiple sclerosis had already been well established, but other applications should be subject to the same rigorous assessment process as applied to other medicines.

"The way that we regulate medicines in this country for clinical indications is through the TGA, and I think we need to keep using those mechanisms...to regulate the availability of cannabis - not crude cannabis that can be grown at home, but the pharmaceutical preparations that are actually already available, and even looking at putting those on the PBS for particular indications," the AMA President said.

He said the introduction and use of cannabis for medical purposes was akin to the regulation and use of morphine.

A/Professor Owler said that, while morphine was used in medical application every day, it remained a controlled substance.

"We wouldn't dream of being without it. But we, of course, don't let it out on the street," he said. "We don't have people using it in an unregulated fashion, and I think we have to take some of the emotion out of this debate and look at marijuana or cannabis in exactly the same way."

(See: www.ama.com.au/ausmed/put-medicinal-cannabis-test-ama)

These views are also supported by the NSW Cancer Council and the NSW Nursing and Midwives Association.

Internationally, there is a substantial scientific evidence from renowned experts supporting the benefits of medical cannabis for these conditions and there is also an abundance of anecdotal

evidence. This is a list of American and International organisations that support the use medical cannabis.

[AIDS Action Council](#)
[AIDS Treatment News](#)
[American Academy of Family Physicians](#)
[American Medical Student Association](#)
[American Nurses Association](#)
[American Osteopathic Association](#)
[American Preventive Medical Association](#)
[American Public Health Association](#)
[American Society of Addiction Medicine](#)
[Arthritis Research Campaign \(United Kingdom\)](#)
[Australian Medical Association \(New South Wales\) Limited](#)
[Australian National Task Force on Cannabis](#)
[Belgian Ministry of Health](#)
[British House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology](#)
[British House of Lords Select Committee On Science and Technology \(Second Report\)](#)
[British Medical Association](#)
[Canadian AIDS Society](#)
[Canadian Special Senate Committee on Illegal Drugs](#)
[Dr. Dean Edell \(surgeon and nationally syndicated radio host\)](#)
[French Ministry of Health](#)
[Health Canada](#)
[Kaiser Permanente](#)
[Lymphoma Foundation of America](#)
[The Montel Williams MS Foundation](#)
[Multiple Sclerosis Society \(Canada\)](#)
[The Multiple Sclerosis Society \(United Kingdom\)](#)
[National Academy of Sciences Institute Of Medicine \(IOM\)](#)
[National Association for Public Health Policy](#)
[National Nurses Society on Addictions](#)
[Netherlands Ministry of Health](#)
[New England Journal of Medicine](#)
[New South Wales \(Australia\) Parliamentary Working Party on the Use of Cannabis for Medical Purposes](#)
[Dr. Andrew Weil \(nationally recognized professor of internal medicine and founder of the National Integrative Medicine Council\)](#)

See: http://norml.org/component/zoo/item/quick-reference?category_id=734 for the links)

The Australian people also very strongly support the use of medical cannabis. The figures are detailed in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)'s national drug survey of 24,000 people across Australia in 2013. The data showed the national average of 74.7 per cent support for medical cannabis.

It is not that Australia should be a policy trailblazer on this issue. In truth we are trying to catch up to other countries - such as the United States, Canada, Israel, and Holland - where regulatory schemes for the use of medical cannabis have already been implemented. Following years of debate investigation and research into the very same issues that are currently before this Senate Committee, medical cannabis is now available in some thirty States of the USA and widely across Canada. (See: www.mpp.org/legislation/state-by-state-medical-marijuana-laws.html for a State by State overview of the US position). The US government even holds a patent on cannabis as a neuro-protectant, hardly something they would do for a substance that offers no medical potential. <http://www.google.com.au/patents/US6630507>

The situation that these other countries have already been through is now being echoed in Australia by the multiple committee's set up by State and Federal governments to once again investigate medical cannabis and drug laws. Clearly the opinion of legal, medical etc experts is rightly respected and sought after but the work has by and large already been done in other countries. The real question is not whether medical cannabis should be available in Australia but the mechanism to make it available.

Australia already has a effective system in place for the consideration, approval, prescription and dispensing of therapeutic products. As the President of the AMA said:

“The way that we regulate medicines in this country for clinical indications is through the TGA, and I think we need to keep using those mechanisms...to regulate the availability of cannabis - not crude cannabis that can be grown at home, but the pharmaceutical preparations that are actually already available, and even looking at putting those on the PBS for particular indications.”

The medical profession acknowledges the benefits of medical cannabis and supports it being made available as do a significant majority of the Australian public. There is demonstrably significant benefits for many Australians suffering from severe and disabling conditions. There is an existing process for the approval, prescription and dispensing of the product. It as they say a "no brainer" and I ask that the Committee recommend that the Bill be passed, and urges the government to urgently consider fast tracking the Legislation so as not to delay access to the proven benefits of the products to Australians.

Yours sincerely

Kate Dalton