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Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
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**Cancer Voices Australia Submission
to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee's Inquiry re:
Regulator of Medicinal Cannabis Bill 2014.**

Cancer Voices Australia thanks the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee for its 18 February invitation to make a submission addressing this Bill.

Cancer Voices Australia (CVA) is the independent, 100% volunteer voice of people affected by cancer, working to improve the cancer experience for Australians, their families and friends. We are active in the areas around diagnosis, information, treatment, research, support, care, survivorship and policy. To achieve this we work with decision-makers, ensuring the patient perspective is heard.

Cancer Voices has led the cancer consumer movement in Australia since 2000. The CVA network across Australia shares objectives and works together on national issues identified as important by their members, with consumers working to help others affected by cancer.

Cancer Voices has long supported legislative change to enable access to medical cannabis for those who will benefit from its use, and under sensible safeguards. This especially applies to people with cancer, as there is good evidence to support efficacy in assisting the reduction of nausea, vomiting and pain associated with cancer and its treatment. We do not suggest that medical cannabis should replace other currently offered drugs, such as the opioids for pain relief, but should supplement them *according to patient choice with appropriate medical advice*. We are aware that Australia is in a catch up phase with regards to serious consideration about how best to make access possible, and commend any efforts towards this.

Our NSW arm, Cancer Voices NSW, is involved in the excellent initiatives adopted by the NSW Government. This includes making \$9million available for clinical trials of medical cannabis, a process already underway. The NSW Government has also developed the Terminal Illness Cannabis Scheme (TICS) so that adults with a terminal illness who choose to use cannabis for symptom relief appropriately, will not be charged by NSW Police.

These are both important steps which need to be recognised (see NSW Health Fact Sheet - *Clinical Trials: Medical Use of Cannabis*).

Our main concern about this Bill is that it appears to be circumventing, and adding complexity to, our current process of listing and approving medical drugs by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. Senator Di Natale made it clear that “the (proposed) register is modelled on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods” (Second Reading Speech 27 Nov 2014, Hansard p 9505). However we have not seen an argument to support the need for a separate Register, with a separate Regulator, Board, CEO and staff. We do commend the inclusion of a consumer on the proposed Board. We trust the Senate Inquiry will clarify the rationale for separation.

Many of the proposals appear sensible and valuable. Cancer Voices welcomes them to the ongoing debate at both state and federal levels. We hope that the eventual outcome will bring Australia up to speed regarding the safe and efficacious access to medical cannabis which is very much needed by eligible patients.

Yours sincerely

Sally Crossing AM
Convenor

5 March 2015