



MEDIA RELEASE

Parliamentary committee recommends reforms to allow medical use of cannabis by people with terminal illness and AIDS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

15 May 2013

A parliamentary committee is recommending that the NSW Government amend legislation to allow the medical use of cannabis by patients with terminal illness and those who have moved from HIV infection to AIDS. The recommendation, if adopted by the Government, will allow patients with specific medical conditions certified by their specialist treating medical practitioner to possess and use up to 15 grams of dry cannabis or the equivalent amount of other cannabis products and equipment.

The inquiry by the Legislative Council's General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 was established last November to examine the efficacy and safety of cannabis for medical purposes. It found that there is scientific evidence that cannabis has some value in the treatment of certain medical conditions, most notably a number of painful conditions that do not respond to existing medications.

The unanimously adopted report, released today, expresses the Committee's support for cannabis-based pharmaceuticals – recently approved by the Commonwealth Government for prescription for a very specific target group – to be made available to other patient groups. The Committee urges that this expansion occur as quickly as possible and on the basis of scientific evidence.

'The Committee believes that it is preferable and workable for patients with severe illness to access the proven benefits of cannabinoids through pharmaceuticals, which are standardised and highly regulated by the Commonwealth Government,' said the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, Chair of the Committee. 'We recognise the risks and negative effects of crude cannabis use particularly via smoking and by no means do we endorse the recreational use of cannabis. However, the Committee considers that on the basis of the available evidence, providing for a very small and specific group of patients to use crude cannabis products for medical purposes legally is both appropriate and compassionate.'

'The Committee believes, like almost all inquiry participants, that people who are at the end of their life and take measures to either relieve their severe pain or stimulate their appetite should not be criminalised,' said Mrs Mitchell. 'We consider it important to protect this small and highly vulnerable group from any criminal justice consequences for their end stage health condition. These people should not be subject to the humiliation and stress of arrest and appearing in court, and indeed, should be able to rest in the knowledge that they are actively protected from such consequences.'

'This should be done by providing a complete defence from arrest and prosecution for patients and their carers in certain circumstances. Patients and carers would need to be registered with the NSW Ministry of Health, having been certified by their treating specialist medical practitioner that the patient has a terminal illness or AIDS.'

Mrs Mitchell further commented that the Committee is very mindful of the suffering of patients with chronic pain for whom existing pain management is not effective. ‘We see the pharmaceutical system as the best option for these patients, and strongly encourage further clinical trials to build the evidence base about the medical uses of cannabis.’

A list of the Committee’s recommendations is attached. The report is on the Committee’s website: www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/gpsc4. Hard copies are available on request.

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For further information please contact Committee Chair Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, on 9230 3499 or 0407 402 448.