

**Submission
No 12**

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE REGULATORY
FRAMEWORK FOR CANNABIS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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I am deeply concerned about the current regulatory framework surrounding cannabis, particularly in relation to medicinal use. This submission seeks to highlight the challenges faced by patients, like myself, who rely on cannabis for medicinal purposes, underscore the disparity in regulatory treatment between cannabis and alcohol, emphasise the potential benefits of legalisation, draw attention to the historical model of cannabis law reform in our allied nations, the United States and the United Kingdom, and provide a comparison of global statistics on deaths from cannabis use versus alcohol.

Personal Experience

I suffer from arthritis, a condition that significantly impacts my quality of life. Over the years, I have explored various treatment options, and I have found that cannabis provides me with substantial relief from pain and inflammation associated with arthritis. However, accessing medicinal cannabis products has been a daunting, expensive and arduous process.

Challenges in Access

One of the primary challenges I have encountered is the difficulty in accessing medicinal cannabis products compared to the ease of obtaining them in regions where cannabis has been legalised. In jurisdictions where cannabis is legal, such as certain parts of the United States and the United Kingdom, speaking to knowledgeable staff at a dispensary is a straightforward process. They can provide guidance on product selection, dosing, and usage, tailored to individual needs. In contrast, navigating the bureaucratic hurdles and stringent regulations surrounding medicinal cannabis can be overwhelming and frustrating.

Medical Value of Cannabis vs. Destructive Impacts of Alcohol

It is essential to acknowledge the stark contrast between the medical value of cannabis and the legal but destructive impacts of alcohol. While cannabis has demonstrated therapeutic potential for various medical conditions, including pain management, inflammation, epilepsy, and mental health disorders, alcohol is associated with numerous adverse health effects, including liver disease, addiction, violence, and road accidents.

Despite the well-documented harms of alcohol, it remains widely available and socially acceptable in NSW. The disproportionate regulatory treatment between cannabis and alcohol raises questions about the consistency and fairness of drug policy. If alcohol, with its proven negative health and societal impacts, can be legally and readily accessible, why are patients like myself facing barriers to accessing a potentially safer alternative in cannabis?

Potential Benefits of Legalisation

In addition to its medical value, legalising cannabis in NSW could yield significant economic benefits. The legal cannabis market has the potential to generate substantial tax revenue, which

could be invested in healthcare, education, and drug rehabilitation programs. Furthermore, legalisation has the potential to disrupt the black market trade in cannabis, redirecting profits away from criminal enterprises and towards regulated, tax-paying businesses.

Historical Model of Cannabis Law Reform

Australian values and legal frameworks have historically been modelled on those of our allies, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom. Both of these nations have undergone significant cannabis law reform in recent years, with various states in the U.S. and parts of the U.K. legalising cannabis for medicinal and/or recreational use. The experiences of these nations provide valuable insights into the potential benefits and challenges of cannabis regulation, which can inform policy decisions in NSW.

Global Statistics Comparison

Global statistics on deaths from cannabis use versus alcohol present a stark contrast. According to various studies and reports, including those from reputable institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO), deaths directly attributed to cannabis use are extremely rare, if not non-existent. In contrast, alcohol-related deaths are a significant public health concern worldwide, with millions of deaths annually attributed to alcohol consumption. These statistics underscore the relative safety profile of cannabis compared to alcohol and highlight the need for a rational and evidence-based approach to drug policy.

Recommendations

Streamlining Access: There is an urgent need to streamline the process for accessing medicinal cannabis in NSW. This could involve simplifying regulatory requirements, reducing bureaucratic red tape, and increasing education and awareness among healthcare professionals.

Expediting CBD Availability: The TGA should reconsider its stringent requirements for CBD products, particularly for those with a proven safety profile and therapeutic efficacy. Expediting the availability of CBD in pharmacies would improve access for patients with conditions such as arthritis.

Policy Consistency: Policymakers should reassess the regulatory treatment of cannabis compared to other substances like alcohol. Drug policy should be evidence-based, consistent, and focused on minimising harm to individuals and society.

Consideration of Legalisation: The potential benefits of legalising cannabis, including tax revenue generation and the disruption of the black market trade, should be carefully considered by policymakers. Drawing from the experiences of our allied nations, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, can provide valuable insights into the potential impacts of cannabis regulation in NSW.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current regulatory framework for cannabis in NSW, particularly regarding medicinal use, is inadequate and poses significant challenges for patients like myself. By addressing these challenges and implementing reforms to improve access and affordability, we can ensure that patients receive the care and treatment they deserve. Additionally, policymakers should critically examine the potential benefits of legalising cannabis and consider the experiences of other jurisdictions in shaping drug policy in NSW.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Sincerely, Louise Schachter