

Submission
No 306

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Submission to the Inquiry into the Impact of the Regulatory Framework for Cannabis in New South Wales

To the Honourable Members of Portfolio Committee No. 1 – Premier and Finance:

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this vital inquiry into the impact of the regulatory framework for cannabis in New South Wales. As a front-line and emergency service worker who has served the community of NSW for 30 years, both professionally and on a volunteer basis, I have first-hand experience of the profound benefits medical cannabis can offer. However, I have also encountered significant challenges and inconsistencies within the current regulatory framework, which I believe warrant your attention.

Personal Experience with Medical Cannabis:

I have dedicated three decades to serving and protecting the people of NSW. In the course of my duties, I have faced numerous physical and psychological challenges that have taken a toll on my health. After exploring various treatment options, I found medical cannabis to be a highly effective solution for managing my symptoms. Medical cannabis has significantly improved my quality of life, allowing me to continue serving my community and maintain my personal well-being.

Cost of Medical Cannabis:

Despite its effectiveness, the cost of medical cannabis is exceptionally high compared to other prescribed medications. I spend approximately \$15,000 per year on medical cannabis, a financial burden that is unsustainable for many patients. This exorbitant cost poses a significant barrier to accessing essential treatment and highlights the need for regulatory reforms to make medical cannabis more affordable and accessible.

Hypocrisy and Inconsistency in Driving Laws:

Despite the therapeutic benefits of medical cannabis, I have faced substantial difficulties due to the stringent driving laws in NSW. The current framework exhibits a stark inconsistency and, frankly, hypocrisy. It is legal to drive while partially impaired by other substances, such as alcohol or prescription medications, provided the individual is not impaired to a dangerous level. In contrast, the guidelines for medical cannabis are overly restrictive, with a blanket prohibition on driving. This lack of nuanced regulation fails to consider the individual circumstances and the responsible use of medical cannabis.

This inflexible approach has had a major impact on my recovery and ability to engage with my community and family. I live over an hour and a half away from my family, and the inability to drive has severely limited my capacity to visit them, thereby affecting my mental health and social support network. The guidelines should be revised to reflect the same principles applied to other impairing substances, focusing on impairment rather than mere presence of the substance.

Decriminalisation and Personal Cultivation:

Furthermore, I strongly believe that cannabis should be decriminalised within NSW. Allowing individuals to cultivate their own medication, within certain limitations, would significantly reduce the financial burden on patients like myself. Personal cultivation would empower patients to

manage their health more effectively and affordably, removing a massive financial strain from both individuals and their families.

Economic and Social Costs of Current Cannabis Laws:

The current approach to cannabis regulation has substantial financial and social costs for the community. Many individuals are incarcerated for non-violent cannabis-related offences, which places a significant burden on the correctional system. The cost of incarcerating these individuals includes not only the direct expenses of maintaining the prison system but also the lost productivity and social disruption caused by removing these individuals from their communities.

Additionally, the punitive measures related to cannabis use, such as the removal of driving licenses, can have far-reaching consequences. For many, losing the ability to drive can lead to loss of employment, inability to fulfil family responsibilities, and increased social isolation. These outcomes not only affect the individuals directly involved but also impose broader social and economic costs, including increased reliance on social services and diminished community engagement.

Economic Benefits of Legalisation:

Although I am no economist, it is clear to me that legalising cannabis within NSW would have massive tax implications that could assist the government with the current financial deficit. The legalisation and regulation of cannabis could generate substantial tax revenue, which could be reinvested in essential public services and infrastructure, benefiting the entire community. Furthermore, the shift from a punitive to a regulatory approach could reduce the costs associated with law enforcement, the judicial system, and incarceration.

Recommendations:

1. **Develop Clear Guidelines for Medical Cannabis Use and Driving:** Similar to alcohol and prescription medications, establish guidelines that allow individuals to use medical cannabis responsibly without automatically prohibiting them from driving. This should include impairment assessments rather than zero-tolerance policies.
2. **Public Education Campaign:** Implement a public education campaign to inform medical cannabis users about safe usage practices and the implications for driving, akin to campaigns for alcohol and prescription medications.
3. **Review and Amend Current Legislation:** Conduct a comprehensive review of the current driving laws related to medical cannabis to ensure they are fair, consistent, and based on scientific evidence regarding impairment. Either align the driving laws for medical cannabis with those for alcohol and other prescription medications, focusing on impairment rather than mere presence of the substance, or adopt a zero-tolerance approach for all impairing substances, including alcohol and prescription medications. The current disparity is unjust and inconsistent.

4. **Reduce the Cost of Medical Cannabis:** Implement measures to reduce the cost of medical cannabis, making it more affordable and accessible to patients who rely on it for their health and well-being. This could include subsidies, insurance coverage, or price regulation mechanisms.

5. **Decriminalise Cannabis and Allow Personal Cultivation:** Decriminalise cannabis within NSW and allow individuals to cultivate their own medication under regulated conditions. This would alleviate the financial burden on patients and ensure they have access to their essential treatment.

6. **Leverage Tax Revenue from Legalisation:** Recognise the potential economic benefits of legalising cannabis, including the generation of substantial tax revenue. This revenue could help address the state's financial deficit and fund public services and infrastructure.

7. **Address the Social Costs of Current Laws:** Reform cannabis laws to reduce the incarceration of individuals for non-violent cannabis-related offences and mitigate the social and economic impact of punitive measures such as license removal. This approach would promote social equity and economic stability within the community.

In conclusion, medical cannabis has been a crucial component of my healthcare regimen, enabling me to continue my service as a front-line worker for the people of New South Wales. However, the current regulatory framework, particularly the driving laws, high costs, and criminalisation of cannabis, imposes undue hardships and fails to consider the realities of responsible medical cannabis use. I urge the committee to consider these points and work towards a more balanced and fair regulatory framework.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,