

The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601
Email: committees@parliament.act.gov.au

13 February 2015

Dear Committee Secretary

Inquiry into the Exposure Draft of the *Drugs of Dependence (Cannabis Use for Medical Purposes) Amendment Bill 2014* and related discussion paper

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Exposure Draft of the *Drugs of Dependence (Cannabis Use for Medical Purposes) Amendment Bill 2014* and related discussion paper.

PHAA has recently developed a Position Statement on Medicinal Cannabis in Australia, outlining the need for a compassionate regime whereby seriously and terminally ill individuals who have been appropriately authorised may possess and use cannabis without penalty. A copy of the Position Statement is attached.

The Position Statement includes the following recommendations:

- Australian governments, collaboratively with members of the affected communities (including families and carers) and public health, medical and law enforcement experts, initiate careful policy work on how to introduce a compassionate, palliation-focused, medicinal cannabis regime within their respective jurisdictions.
- The starting point be the proposals currently before the NSW and ACT legislatures for medicinal cannabis to be available to terminally ill people in circumstances where their doctors and the state/territory health department agree that cannabis may provide palliation benefits to the patient.
- The compassionate medicinal cannabis regime go further than serving only terminally ill people, with possession and use of botanical cannabis and synthetic cannabinoids also carrying no penalty when used by people with other serious health conditions that their doctors and the state/territory health departments consider may be palliated through consuming cannabis, in situations where conventional approaches have been unsuccessful or are contraindicated.
- Considering that pharmaceutical cannabis is legally available in Australia in only one form and for only one narrow indication, the regime needs to also include provisions for the removal of penalties in very limited circumstances for the use of botanical cannabis and its extracts ingested through various routes of administration including smoking (for adults only), vaporisers and food products.
- The regime include provisions providing no penalty for the person with the health condition in question to possess an amount of cannabis that is deemed to be for personal use (i.e. less than the trafficable quantity threshold). The regime should also specify no penalty to that person - or a third party nominated by the person and/or the relevant authorities (doctor/s and health

department) - to cultivate, possess, supply and/or administer personal-use quantities of cannabis product to the person authorised to receive it.

- Governments explore the feasibility of making medicinal cannabis available from other sources, e.g. importing pharmaceutical-standard cannabis from overseas-based producers and/or licensing medicinal cannabis production in Australia.
- Governments support research into the long term benefits and risks of cannabis compounds for medicinal purposes.

We trust that the PHAA Position Statement and its recommendations are useful in informing the Committee's consideration of the Exposure Draft of the *Drugs of Dependence (Cannabis Use for Medical Purposes) Amendment Bill 2014* and related discussion paper.

We would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Committee at a public hearing to elaborate on the issues canvassed in our submission.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries or require additional information.

Yours sincerely



Michael Moore
Chief Executive Officer
Public Health Association of Australia