

Position Statement

Use of Medicinal Cannabis Products in Palliative Care



PalliativeCare
AUSTRALIA

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The term 'medicinal cannabis products' covers a range of cannabis preparations intended for therapeutic use, including pharmaceutical cannabis preparations, such as oils, tinctures and other extracts

Palliative Care Australia (PCA) is the national peak body for palliative care in Australia. PCA provides leadership on palliative care policy and community engagement. Working closely with consumers, its Member Organisations and the palliative care and broader health workforce, PCA aims to improve the quality of life and death for people with a life-limiting illness, their families and carers.

Palliative Care Australia believes that, as with any treatment, the totality of issues involved in the medicinal use of cannabis products must be considered, including clinical efficacy, safety, cost-effectiveness, and access pathways. Any decision around the medicinal use of cannabis cannot be a blanket decision with the assumption that it would be suitable for everyone.

PCA and its member organisations highlight that all people have the right to safe, compassionate and appropriate care as they approach the end of their lives. This includes access to safe medications that are essential to providing quality end of life and palliative care.

PCA agrees that medicinal cannabis products are unregistered therapeutic goods under Australian law¹ and as such, should be regulated under the current therapeutic goods (medicines) regulatory scheme.

PCA maintain that high level evidence needs to identify what conditions and symptoms can benefit from medicinal cannabis products, and show the potential benefits for improving the quality of life of people who are living with a progressive chronic illness, who are in the terminal phase of a condition or approaching the end of life, exceed any possible harms.

PCA believe that continued investment in research will be required, with evidence translated and clearly communicated to clinicians, reinforced by post-market surveillance and processes to report adverse events. Timely education and communication to support clinicians in prescribing medicinal cannabis products is essential, and must facilitate the prescriber taking into account a person's physical, psychological and personal circumstances.

PCA considers that pathways for accessing medicinal cannabis products need to provide clinical oversight given the limited experience and evidence in Australia. As new evidence becomes available and the production of domestic medicinal cannabis commences, both federal and state-based access pathways need to be reviewed to ensure timely access, of particular importance when considering palliative care.

PCA welcomes an appointment to the Australian Advisory Council on the Medicinal Use of Cannabis², and will advocate that regulation should be a matter for relevant experts deciding on the basis of health, science and clinical evidence and not a political or emotive decision.

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¹ *The Therapeutic Goods Act 1989* Section 3 <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2016C01117> [accessed 8/6/17]

² The Australian Advisory Council on the Medicinal Use of Cannabis will provide advice to the Minister for Health on issues relating to the medicinal use of cannabis and the implementation of the regulatory scheme under the *Narcotic Drugs Act 1967*. <https://www.odc.gov.au/australian-advisory-council-medical-use-cannabis-aacmc> [accessed 8/6/17]