



Medicinal Cannabis

Growing interest, evidence and community demand has led to the legislative and policy changes necessary to permit the use of medicinal cannabis in Australia¹.

Legislation allowing the controlled cultivation of medicinal cannabis came into effect in October 2016, and the first licenses for controlled cannabis commercial cultivation were issued early 2017. Prescribed medicinal cannabis use is now legal in all Australian states and territories².

Medicinal cannabis is an 'unapproved therapeutic good' requiring approval for use through the Australian Government Department of Health Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA)^{3,4}. The term 'medicinal cannabis products' describes a range of pharmaceutical cannabis preparations intended for therapeutic use. These include oils, tinctures and other extracts⁵.

Access for authorised prescribers is through the TGA's limited Special Access Scheme (SAS) and is intended for exceptional clinical circumstances. Authorised prescribers must be approved by the TGA, in conjunction with the relevant state or territory, to prescribe 'an unapproved therapeutic good' for a particular condition or category of patient⁶.

There is still limited evidence on the success of medicinal cannabis for the treatment of medical conditions, effective forms and dosage. Studies that have been undertaken have focused mainly on: epilepsy; multiple sclerosis; chronic non-cancer pain; chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting in cancer; and palliative care. Further research is needed, particularly large, high-quality studies, to examine the benefits and risks of medicinal cannabis use in managing health conditions and symptoms⁷.

Preliminary research suggests there may be potential for medicinal cannabis to also be used to assist in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, sleep disorder, mood disorder, spasticity and motor neurone conditions, and as a substitute for other substances of addiction⁸.

It is the position of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation that:

1. Access to cannabis for evidence-based therapeutic purposes should be supported where the person, in consultation with their treating health practitioner/s, receives some benefit or has their symptoms alleviated.
2. Nurses and midwives should be aware of, and informed about, the underpinning legislation relevant to their state or territory which covers the appropriate use of medicinal cannabis for the treatment and management of medical conditions.
3. Large scale, high quality clinical trials should be conducted to further develop the evidence base for the use of medicinal cannabis.
4. Approved medicinal cannabis products should be accessible and affordable.
5. There should be appropriate regulation for the cultivation, manufacture, prescribing, dispensing and administration of medicinal cannabis.



References

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