



The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601
committees@parliament.act

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

This letter is a submission responding to the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services calling for submissions to its inquiry into the Exposure Draft of the *Drugs of Dependence (Cannabis Use for Medical Purposes) Amendment Bill 2014* and related discussion paper.

The AIDS Action Council of the ACT was formed in 1983, and incorporated in 1986, as part of the community response to the impact of the HIV epidemic in Australia. Today the AIDS Action Council is Canberra's leading community-based LGBTI and HIV health organisation. The Council provides information, support and advocacy for LGBTI community and people living with or at risk of acquiring HIV, including sex workers and people who use drugs.

The Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the issues of cannabis use for medical purposes. The Council has long been engaged with drug law reform and our knowledge is based on our experience of providing support to people living with HIV as well as our partnership and support of drug and alcohol support and education programs.

The Council is aware that people living with HIV, like many people with chronic illness, utilise cannabis to alleviate symptoms related to their chronic condition and their medication. We understand from HIV Futures Seven, a national cross-sectional survey of Australians with HIV, that 16.5% of people living with HIV report using cannabis as a complementary therapy, with this number being separate to recreational use. Research has shown that cannabis has been effective in supporting people to deal with pain, loss of appetite, neuropathy and nausea.

It is the Council's position that some form of allowance for personal medical use would allow users more control over issues such as purity, strength and method of production of the cannabis consumed. This would be best achieved through allowing the personal growth of a limited number of plants or for support through certified growers and producers.

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The Council understands that the Bill seeks to amend the *Drugs of Dependence Act 1989* to enable a person to apply in writing to the Chief Health Officer for approval to possess and use cannabis for medical purposes specified in three different categories. Applications must be accompanied by a medical declaration by a doctor. The Bill also provides for the Chief Health Officer to grant a one-year licence to cultivate cannabis for the purposes of an approval.

The provision of information and education to communities that are likely to utilise and benefit from the medical use of cannabis would also be valuable. This should include the engagement of community, service providers and doctors to ensure that reliable information is available to consumers and that potential harms are reduced, for example, by paths for less harmful methods of consumption than smoking.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philippa Moss', written in a cursive style.

Philippa Moss
Acting Executive Director
4 February 2015