



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, AGEING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES  
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## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Drugs of Dependence (Personal Cannabis  
Use) Amendment Bill 2018

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To whom it may concern,

I am writing in response to the Drugs of Dependence (Personal Cannabis Use) Amendment Bill 2018.

As it stands I think the proposed amendments would have a detrimental effect on patients, like myself, who are currently accessing cannabis legally for medical purposes. To legalise cannabis for recreational purposes and for personal cultivation creates several issues in my opinion. I will address these separately.

**Personal history:**

I have been using cannabis to treat a debilitating form of Ankylosing Spondylitis and Endometriosis for nearly 5 years. I was approved as a patient by the TGA under the Special Access Scheme - Category B in July last year. I wrote a submission for the Greens initial bill to the legislative assembly to legalise cannabis for medical purposes in 2015. I have been a fierce advocate for this medication due to my own experience and belief that this medicine should be available to all patients who have a chance of benefiting from it.

**Recreational use:**

I believe to legalise cannabis for recreational use would actually make it harder for patients who need cannabis for medical purposes. It is near impossible to be approved by the TGA let alone actually receive the medicine from a pharmacy in the ACT. A lot of work needs to be done by our government to address these issues before even considering opening the legislation to those who would be using it recreationally.

I have submitted a Freedom of Information request to the TGA to try and identify a doctor in Canberra who is willing to prescribe me cannabis. At the moment I have to attend a clinic in Sydney because the understanding of the current legislation around this medicine is so limited in Canberra that no medical personnel are willing to prescribe it. Doctors are also so far behind the cultural change that has come with the legalisation of medicinal cannabis. They are either ignorant and deny the benefits due to the long held stigma that cannabis is a dangerous, illicit drug.

I believe the government needs to make a more concerted effort in educating health professionals about both cannabis as a medication and what the exact laws are. I have had to personally educate all my treating physicians about cannabis legislation. This is not right. It is not my job as a patient to educate doctors about the law.

To legalise cannabis for recreational use would trigger a complete reversal of the hard work advocates and patients have done to access their medicine. Recreational use opens up a can of worms legally. I don't understand the desire to do this while the current laws surrounding medical use are still denying patients access.

As it stands, to get my script filled I go to Queanbeyan. To get my script filled in the ACT would require me to get approval from the ACT Department of Health every time. This particular part of local legislation raises questions. I am approved federally for this medication by the TGA, surely this should be enough approval. No medication in the country requires national and local approval.

I don't understand the desire to complicate cannabis legislation while access is still so limited to patients who need it most.

**Personal cultivation:**

It is a complete misconception that allowing patients to grow their own cannabis plants would help the issues I outlined above.

Cannabis is an incredibly complex plant, this is what makes it such a powerful medication. I had previously been making my own oil and sourcing it from others, before cannabis was legalised and I was approved. The oil I receive through my prescription, from the pharmacy, has been the most effective anti inflammatory and pain relief I have received to date. The difference in quality is overwhelming. I cannot, and never will be, able to replicate this quality. I do not have the knowledge or equipment necessary.

Legalising cultivation does not help patients. Helping patients who are still in need should be the main priority. The amendments as they stand will not be of much benefit to patients. It will not help us and we need help.

**Conclusion:**

I recently ran out of medically prescribed oil due to the incompetence of the clinic in Sydney (another problem to be addressed separately!) and my inability to find a doctor in Canberra who is willing to prescribe the medication, for which I have federal approval. This was incredibly distressing. I am still recovering from the flare that was caused as a result of not being able to access my medicine. I live in fear of this happening again. Your focus should be on addressing access issues faced by patients in Canberra due to local legislation restrictions, and educating local medical staff. You owe it to those who cannot fight for themselves to fight for their right to access this medication.