



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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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The Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services

Submission from:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I support the legalisation of cannabis use within the ACT by its citizens. From my own recent experience, I offer the following insights:

Why am I advocating for the legalisation of cannabis use?

On the [REDACTED] 2017, my wife was diagnosed with a GBM4 brain tumour; the terminal type. We knew from her medical history that nausea and vomiting were highly likely to be a major issue with chemo and radiation treatment, and had heard cannabis may provide a solution. At that stage the legal pathways to cannabis use were almost non-existent, and extremely expensive, so, being pensioners, we searched for a compassionate black market supply.

As I began to research the use of cannabis, I realised that, like most of the population, I had been brainwashed to believe that cannabis was a terribly dangerous drug. I had had one minor experience of it 50 years ago, so had nothing to teach me otherwise. I also realised that most of the population would still be brainwashed unless they had had personal experience with cannabis. They would have had no reason to change their views.

We quickly learnt that, although our suppliers were not the 'bad assed bikies', but came from the compassionate side of the black market (a side that isn't often reported on, but is still criminalised), no one knew exactly what they were supplying or using. Why? Because cannabis prohibition includes it being illegal to test it in a laboratory to discover its chemical components other than for authorised research. From the reaction of my wife, we soon discovered the full plant extract oil we were using was potent stuff, most likely high in THC, but we had no way of confirming this.

My wife's battle with GBM4 lasted 18 months and she passed away at the end of November 2018.

So what difference did it make for her?

It allowed her to get through chemo and radiation, and recover from both of these debilitating treatments; it did take 6 months to happen. It gave her a period of about 6 months of quality life before the tumour returned by reducing the intensity of headaches and the incidence of seizures.

It also meant that she passed away peacefully and without pain, but with her family around her at home. We couldn't have asked for a better passing. She was not comatose which she would have been had she been administered the normal end of life drugs of morphine and heavy sedatives. This was graphically illustrated to us when she was given the standard treatment several weeks before she passed away. After several hours on this regime, she became comatose and it took her 2 days to recover. She never had this type of reaction with cannabis, even when she was accidentally overdosed.

While she was on this GBM4 journey, the one thing cannabis gave us that the medical establishment did not, was hope. Hope that perhaps a miracle would happen and she would survive. Cannabis has been proven to kill cancer cells in some situations. (See Spanish research).

It also became very obvious, that, although most medical professionals are loath to admit it, standard medicine is severely lacking in many many areas and does not have the answers. It is also obvious the influence of the drug companies. The standard treatments we were offered, often had a line up of drugs. Take drug A to relieve the symptom, then drug B to relieve the side effects of drug A and so on down the chain. With cannabis we

had very few side effects, the worst being overdosing, which resulted in some very good periods of sleep.

During our GBM4 journey, we grew two plants. From these 2 plants we managed to affect 10 different ailments, from toothache to dementia to endometriosis, in a number of different people. However, we were still faced with the original problem; we did not know what we were using.

I believe legalisation of cannabis is a health issue, and it is well within the scope of the health establishment to also provide testing of cannabis material. This would give ACT citizens a huge amount of information that could then be shared, rapidly defining what cannabis material and plant types offer relief for different types of symptoms, and what doesn't work.

When people are faced with serious medical conditions, they are often prepared to do anything, to not only help themselves, but also others in a similar situation. (Check out the Brain Tumour Support Groups on Facebook). If testing were available, results would soon be shared between users, showing what works for what condition, and what doesn't. Is it a double blind clinical trial? No, but it would be user validated trials that could help a lot of people and in a hugely superior time frame compared to the profit driven pharmaceutical companies. (How do you run a double blind trial on a herb that has over 400 components?)

Witness to the use of citizen supplied data are phone apps such as NatureMapr that allow interested users to report on rare plant and animals they discover within the ACT. The motivation amongst patients and their carers to share information about cannabis use would be significantly higher than that among the amateur nature enthusiasts.

Would such a testing regime satisfy the medical profession – probably never, except for some exceptional professionals who will look past the latest offering from their favourite pharmaceutical company and take a glance at the herbal world.

My belief is that most of the population do not understand what the noise is about, and have been thoroughly brain washed, as I was. It is only through education of the real situation that it will change.

Was cannabis a magic bullet? No, but it gave us hope while navigating the worst trauma of our lives. If we had had more facilities and knowledge, perhaps the outcome could have been better and my wife lived a lot longer. This is at least giving people a choice that they otherwise did not have.

What would I like to see from this legislation?

1) Don't get hung up on the number of plants a person can grow. Recently a gentleman was sentenced for growing over 200 plants, but his use was totally compassionate. I don't believe he should have been prosecuted at all. He can no longer assist all the people who were using his medicine before he was caught. Is this a fair and reasonable outcome from the legislation?

How do you compare someone like the gentleman above, with someone who grows 4 plants and uses those to attract clients whom they then up-sell with methamphetamine. Obviously two extremely different outcomes, but the law doesn't distinguish between them. It is time for the law to have some intelligence.

2) Drug use is a mental health issue. Locking people up for using drugs is doing nothing to add to their role in society. Drug use covers up the symptoms of a mental health issue,

often originating in childhood, the major difference being that the legal drugs are administered by the medical profession whereas the 'non-legal' drugs are self administered.

3) Is 'recreational use' different from 'medicinal use'? This is a highly contentious issue. Do people smoke cigarettes, or drink alcohol for recreation, or is it actually in response to a mental health issue, whether or not they are willing to admit to it.

4) Please include a facility to allow users to discover what they are using at an affordable price – ie testing. If cheap or free testing is provided, the leap in knowledge will be profound, not only from a medical perspective, but also from a plant perspective. For the plants being grown, what are their major characteristics and how do these impact medical conditions? This would put considerable capability back in the hands of ordinary citizens.

For those who are really brave:

1) Every old peoples home and rest home should have their own cannabis patch and make their own medicines from it. This would reduce their medical bills enormously and provide a hugely better experience for the residents. It could also go a long way to solving the violence from dementia problem.

2) Every penitentiary in the country should teach the inmates how to grow their own plants, how to make their own medicine and how to manage their use of the plant so they do not become addicted. This would make for way less violence in prisons and probably have major cost savings as well.

Thank you for taking our experience into consideration.