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Legal and Social Issues Committee
Victoria Parliament
Australia
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Date

RE: Inquiry into the use of Cannabis in Victoria

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this important Inquiry.

I am an ex pat Victorian now living in Spain. I left Australia in 2014 because I needed to be in a country where I could easily treat my ulcerative colitis with cannabis. At that time, medical use in Australia was not widely accepted (or legal and no provision was made for a defence in court for people who needed to use cannabis for medicinal reasons).

I treated my condition with great success (**for 3.5 years with self supply**), and after being arrested for possession and cultivation, I was left with no choice but to abandon my homeland in order to have peace of mind and safely access cannabis. An effective and safe medicine that is perfect to treat my condition without nasty side effects.

Since relocating to Spain, my symptoms are in remission and I am very healthy. I became President of a Cannabis Social Club that has been operating successfully now for 5 years.

My submission addresses the Terms of Reference listed here and aims to introduce the Committee to the Social Club Model used in Spain, that has been successful in achieving these outcomes and a model I believe is worthy of the Committee's consideration as being the best way to:

- 1. Prevent young people and children from accessing and using cannabis in Victoria;*
- 2. Protect public health and public safety in relation to the use of cannabis in Victoria;*
- 3. Prevent criminal activity relating to the illegal cannabis trade in Victoria;*
- 4. Assess the health, mental health, and social impacts of cannabis use on people who use cannabis, their families and carers;*
- 5. Discuss the **Cannabis Social Club** model as a possible way of achieving the desired outcomes and how it may be adapted for Victoria.*

The Social Club Model – Introduction

Australia has a thriving cannabis culture. Cannabis Associations give people the ability to try a variety of cannabis strains and products of a consistent quality and with safe accessibility. Clubs can provide both – and at reasonable prices, unlike the black market or the imported, prescription products now available.

Social users like to have a choice of strains to suit their mood or a situation. They may need to focus on a job, or be creative in a project or want to calm the stress of life at the end of the day. Under this model different strains for different requirements could be readily available to members.

The greatest majority of people who use cannabis socially do not want to see supply put into the hands of big business to the exclusion of the smaller producers, many of whom operate illegally now. Within this latter group there exists an invaluable knowledge bank. Some of these growers could use their skills to produce quality boutique products – rather than a sterile, one size fits all product similar to the pharmaceutical model currently in place in Australia.

Cannabis Social Clubs – How do social clubs work?

“.. Cannabis social clubs (CSCs) are private, non-profit organisations in which cannabis is collectively grown and distributed to registered members. The growth of the CSC model in Spain demonstrates that cannabis legalisation does not have to mean commercialisation. As CSCs show, it is entirely possible to restrict the availability and promotion of cannabis while at the same time making the drug legally available to adult users.

Additionally, the UN drug conventions have been interpreted as permitting CSCs, on the basis that they are an extension of decriminalisation policies. Because of this, the CSC model avoids many of the political and diplomatic obstacles associated with more far-reaching systems of legal regulation ...” <https://transformdrugs.org/cannabis-social-clubs-in-spain-legalisation-without-commercialisation/>

Cannabis Associations

A cannabis Association is a group of associated cannabis consumers who self cultivate in order to supply their members with cannabis according to the consumption requirements of their individual members.

All members must be over 18 years of age and be Australian citizens. New associates are accepted by a referral from an existing member. This helps create a social aspect or link to cannabis consumption that starts to normalize the environment.

1. Health and safety regulations

A cannabis Association must have adequate ventilation. Comprising of an industrial extraction system with carbon and paper filters as well as an ozone generator to prevent unwanted odour to neighbours. And an intake system of fresh air must be circulated into the smoking room to maintain movement of air and relatively smoke free environment. All Cannabis Associations should attend a health and safety protocols guidance course with government health and safety departments of each state. This course would teach staff and management of cannabis associations some basic functions cannabis has with the endocannabinoid system and the body. As well as giving guides for healthy annual consumption quantities less than 1 kg for recreational members. As well as teaching staff to recognize that members may arrive intoxicated on alcohol or other substances and how to approach these situations. Cannabis Associations are for consumption of cannabis and cannabis products only, no alcohol. An association may choose to have a weekly locum with a Doctor to address the needs of any medical members wishing to make appointments. This would also help address some of the more serious needs and management of chronically ill members. Another precaution towards health and safety taken is Cannabis Association Organic Oz uses no synthetic mineral fertilizer or chemical pest control management. Following certified organic agricultural protocols. This practice guarantees members will suffer no adverse effects from the consumption of the cannabis produced by the association.

2 For a cannabis Association to successfully maintain its members they need to self cultivate cannabis. This will ensure a high level of consistent quality and good practice to its members. All cannabis products produced by the association should only be consumed by members of the association. This closed loop of production, consumption and social cohesion are the basis of avoiding the black market as associated cannabis consumers. Security is of great importance and systems with cameras, infrared lasers, motion detection, physical locks, safe room or safe for cannabis stocks. Background checks and references of members or employees of a cannabis Association need to be approached with more scrutiny.

So far in the past 5 years as president of Cannabis Association Organic Oz in Barcelona and servicing over 3000 members in that time, the biggest problems presented to all these people is police intervention and criminalization for choosing to consume a medical non toxic plant. The negative social impacts associated with cannabis consumption and treatment of consumers by police and politicians are the most harmful destructive impacts made on individual's lives. The stigma and continuous propaganda used by politicians to keep the misinformed public voters on side are the basis of much of this social isolation and harm. Most cannabis consumers biggest concern is intervention by police. There exists a constant mental stress of criminalisation to all medical users or parents, grandparents, trying to live a peaceful life and maintain their health with the fear of being arrested. Another great advantage, I

have experienced, of a cannabis Associations is the ability to educate members about alternative methods of consumption and avoiding the use of tobacco.

In my experience I have found members are very good at managing their cannabis consumption. The overall impact cannabis Associations have is a normalization and de stigmatization for cannabis consumers to the public. There has never been any violence in the association over the time I have been President.

Who can set up a Cannabis Social Club and what is necessary to do so?

To establish a Cannabis Association there needs to be a board of directors consisting of a President, Treasurer and a Secretary. The board of directors can be elected annually by the members of the association at an Annual General Meeting, or by the owners of the Association.

What kind of “rules” does a Social club operate and who sets the rules?

Why do we need to keep commercialisation out of the picture?

Cannabis Associations have different rules but many follow very similar protocols for the smoking room or club. This means no people under 18 years of age and usually no alcohol consumption. The rules of the association are communicated through the directive board to the employees. Most communication to members can be done through email, Instagram or in person at the association.

With less attention to profit motives to increase cannabis consumption or initiate new users, the clubs offer a more cautious, public health-centred alternative to large-scale retail cannabis markets dominated by commercial enterprises.

What are the advantages of this model over other models ?

Cannabis Associations are a far softer and more normal approach to adult cannabis consumption. An entire community can slowly discover and experience cannabis within their own local areas. Reducing the need to drive or travel far to consume it or take their cannabis home to consume. Cannabis Associations help guide and carefully inform members and become a bridge between the Public health system and the public.

How could this model be adapted for use in Victoria?

Decriminalisation or legalization has to happen first, and home grow has to be permitted without penalty.

HOW THIS MODEL ADDRESSES THE TERMS OF REFERENCE:

Terms of Reference 1

How will this model keep Cannabis out of the reach of children and young people wanting access ?

Cannabis Associations only allow entry to individuals of 18 years plus.

Terms of Reference 2

What are the benefits of this model for public health and safety ?

Cannabis Associations can work together with Department of health by providing occupational awareness training courses to Associations. Cannabis Associations can provide the public with regulated cannabis products to consume in a safe well ventilated environment.

Terms of Reference 3

How does this model prevent criminal activity relating to the illegal cannabis trade in Victoria?

Cannabis Associations help prevent criminal activity by providing the public with a safe and secure clubhouse to consume and store cannabis. Associations would self cultivate their cannabis in a secure regulated production facility.

Terms of Reference 4

How does this model influence the health, mental health, and social impacts of cannabis use on people who use cannabis, their families and carers?

Providing safe access of cannabis to Australian adults will greatly decrease any negative impacts to the overall mental health of individuals and their families as opposed to the current model of criminalization.

POSITIVE HEALTH OUTCOMES

Health benefits of cannabis are becoming more widely known and accepted as banks of research studies build and clinical trials succeed.

Cannabis is not the demon drug it has been painted in the 80 years of prohibition. Prior to that cannabis was a widely used product and a valuable tool for doctors and the “go to” drug of choice because of its safety and efficacy.

More access can lead to improved health outcomes for some sufferers of chronic illness including pain and auto immune conditions; and many other conditions such as epilepsy Touretes, migraines etc. Australian citizens have been treating themselves for decades with cannabis and there have been no recorded deaths. Cannabis is not toxic and cannot kill you.

It has been asserted that cannabis assists in getting people off harder pharmaceutical drugs such as pain killers and anti epileptic medications that have severe and lasting side effects. Legalising cannabis could reduce the demand for these drugs and reduce the financial demands of the PBS on the taxpayer.

Cannabis does not have to be smoked. It can be vaporised or ingested infused into food and other edible products or taken orally as oil.

Clubs can provide access to cannabis for medicinal use without all the barriers currently faced by patients such as delays caused by red tape and cost; especially for those on low income who have been treating themselves but are unable to access or prefer not to use corporate versions of cannabis medicine.

POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

The “fear” of mental health card is often played by prohibitionists. It is basically propaganda -especially the claim that it causes schizophrenia and psychosis. Worldwide, cannabis is the most widely used illicit drug. The number of users being diagnosed with schizophrenia has stayed stable at 1% for decades despite stronger strains and more users. Drug experts say cannabis causes paranoia, anxiety and depression. But cannabis is frequently being prescribed by doctors in Australia to treat anxiety, depression, insomnia and PTSD. Paranoia is caused more by the legal status of the drug and fear of being caught with it in your possession than by using cannabis.

Under the current system in Australia, cannabis is being used as a prescription only medicine to treat many common **mental health conditions** such as insomnia, anxiety, PTSD and depression. Research shows that CBD rich cannabis can treat psychosis.

POSITIVE SOCIAL OUTCOMES

Cannabis users, on the whole, have a reputation of being “chilled” or “laid back” and thus are not as predisposed to domestic violence or anti social behaviour in the same way as people who use alcohol.

“Why introduce another drug?” is what we hear often from those who oppose cannabis legalisation. According to research in recent years, cannabis is a much safer healthier choice than other legally obtainable social drugs ,like alcohol and tobacco, that burden our health system. Statistics show that 4 million Australians use cannabis on a regular basis and this has been the case for several decades now, so it can hardly be classed as introducing “another drug”.

OTHER SOCIAL OUTCOMES

The current laws surrounding cannabis (possess, cultivate, implements) for personal use are outdated and are causing the public to mistrust and disrespect the police. Too many times police say to people they are arresting for these personal use crimes that they “don’t want to be doing this” FACT: Current cannabis laws are criminalizing law abiding citizens and creating a social separation and mistrust of the police.

Cannabis social clubs (could) educate users about the risks involved in driving like being caught by roadside saliva testing which can yield a false positive or negative resulting in financial loss and loss of license for the mere presence of THC rather than impaired driving.

Legalising cannabis and driver education can help reduce the road toll because of reduced alcohol consumption by people who would rather be using cannabis (**see articles in reference list**)

Conclusion

Cannabis Associations should seriously be considered as a model for adult cannabis consumption as they become the bridge between the public health system and the public. Creating safe places for adults to consume a regulated cannabis product is far more productive, progressive and a true responsibility towards health and safety of Australian citizens.

Having experienced this model first hand I can safely say I believe it is well worth considering as it answers many of the concerns expressed terms of reference:

- (a) Cannabis Associations create a safe place for adults to go and socialise without living in fear of the consequences.
- (b) Cannabis Associations substantially reduce the ability of children and youth to access cannabis
- (c) Cannabis Associations create a safe place for users while impacting positively on policing budgets.
- (d) Cannabis Associations create a safe supply chain without profit seeking from criminal or corporate players.

(e) Cannabis Associations provide an affordable and accessible option for medical users in the community.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry. I am available to give evidence by teleconference if required.

Yours sincerely
President of Cannabis Association Organic Oz
Marc Selan

(SOME REFERENCES ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE)

New research conducted by the Lambert Initiative for Cannabinoid Therapeutics at the University of Sydney reveals a quarter of Australians with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) have used cannabis, predominantly from illicit sources, to manage their condition. They reported improvements in symptoms and reduced use of prescription medication. cannabis use in IBD patients—has revealed that 25.3 percent of the 838 respondents were using or had previously used medicinal cannabis to manage their symptoms.

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-04-survey-results-reveal-australian-usage.html>

REFERENCES

Social Clubs in Spain article <https://transformdrugs.org/cannabis-social-clubs-in-spain-legalisation-without-commercialisation/>

Cannabis safer than alcohol

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<https://www.wbur.org/commonhealth/2016/11/02/marijuana-safety>

<https://www.iflscience.com/health-and-medicine/new-study-suggests-risks-marijuana-use-have-been-overestimated/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4311234/>

<https://rgable.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/toxicity-addiction-offprint2.pdf>

use of cannabis as an exit drug

<https://www.marijuanamoment.net/cannabis-may-ease-opioid-withdrawal-symptoms-johns-hopkins-study-finds/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6135562/>

<https://healer.com/patients-turn-to-cannabis-as-an-exit-drug-from-chronic-opioid-use-and-addiction/>

<http://sponsored.bostonglobe.com/weedmaps/cannabis-the-exit-drug/>

<https://filtermag.org/sure-cannabis-is-a-gateway-drug-towards-less-drug-use/>

New Frontier Data's library of global cannabis and hemp analysis.

*It remains early for a comprehensive, nationwide evaluation of the effects of cannabis legalisation on traffic fatalities, especially given the patchwork of states with legalized programs in place. **Nevertheless, early indications discount the fears about increased risks from traffic fatalities (2019)***

<https://newfrontierdata.com/cannabis-insights/data-shows-fatal-traffic-accidents-do-not-increase-after-cannabis-legalisation/>

*Research from the American Journal of Public Health set out to evaluate fatalities as a result of vehicle crashes in Washington state and Colorado ..**Their results showed no significant difference between pre and post legalization crash fatalities (2017)**.*

<https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2017.303848>

*Some studies, especially concerning medical marijuana, suggest that **marijuana legalization might actually reduce fatalities by reducing drunk driving**. All in all, no conclusive or definitive patterns related to cannabis legalization have appeared in the data or research to this point. (2018) <https://reason.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/evaluating-research-marijuana-legalization-traffic-accidents.pdf>*

the Accuracy of mobile drug testing devices is unstable
<https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2019/09/12/study-casts-doubt-on-accuracy-of-mobile-drug-testing-devices-.html>