

Inquiry into the use of Cannabis in Victoria

██████████

Organisation Name:
Your position or role:

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Drag the statements below to reorder them. In order of priority, please rank the themes you believe are most important for this Inquiry into the use of Cannabis in Victoria to consider::

Accessing and using cannabis, Mental health, Public health, Young people and children, Social impacts, Criminal activity, Education, Public safety

What best describes your interest in our Inquiry? (select all that apply) :
Individual

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

Select all that apply. Do you think there should be restrictions on the use of cannabis? :

Personal use of cannabis should be decriminalised.

(Decriminalised: there are no criminal or civil penalties instead a person is referred to a drug diversion program or other health/ treatment service), Personal use of cannabis should be legal. , Sale of cannabis should be legal and regulated. , Cultivation of cannabis for personal use should be legal.

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [5f4879115cacc-Submission Rev0.pdf](#)

File2:

File3:

Signature:

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To whom it may concern. I am writing to assist the Legal and Social Issues Committees inquiry into the use of cannabis in Victoria. I believe that I can speak with a degree of authority on the subject. I earned two degrees, one in Engineering and the other in Business. I also am a casual cannabis user and have a keen interest in the subject of its prohibition and, more recently, its regulation.

The short-term effects of cannabis have been well established. It is known for quite some time that working memory is affected when smoking cannabis. The ability to hold, manipulate and remember information after a short delay is impaired after smoking the drug (Tinklenberg, Melges, Hollister, & Gillespie, 1970). This effect has also been observed in separate studies (Heishman, Arasteh, & Stitzer, 1997) (Tinklenberg, Melges, Hollister, & Gillespie, 1970). It is noteworthy that there is no significant differences in these memory tasks 19 hours after exposure (Pope & Yurgelun, 1996). According to the alcohol and drug foundation of Australia the effects of cannabis differ from person to person. These effects may include memory impairment, slower reflexes, bloodshot eyes, increased heart rate and mild anxiety and paranoia. It should be emphasised that these effects are temporary and subside within usually 2 to 4 hours when smoked. (Guidance for the use of medicinal cannabis in Australia: Overview, 2017). In regard to a the long term effects of the drug, despite a meta-analysis looking specifically at adult users who were abstinent from the drug in their teenage years, it remains unclear as to whether the adults in these studies suffered any lasting, long term effects from the usage. (Lovell, Akhurst, Padgett, Garry, & Matthews, 2020).

The first in depth study into the effects of smoking cannabis in the United States was the LaGuardia Committee. It was conducted in 1893-94, concerning the use of cannabis in New York. Among the findings were, that smoking cannabis does not lead to addiction, that cannabis use did not lead to heroin , morphine or cocaine addiction, that it was not widespread amongst school age children and use of the substance was not a determining factor in the commission of major crimes. In 1928 Victoria was the first state in Australia to control cannabis upon the passing of the poisons act. cannabis was grouped in with morphine, cocaine and heroin, which are regarded as highly addictive and destructive substances. Demonstrably cannabis does not seem to fit this category. Although there does not seem to be any evidence of any effects in adults outside the short term, there is evidence to suggest that cannabis usage in adolescents can have long term effects. This effect can be observed when comparing users who began consuming cannabis before the age of 17, with users who began after this age. The study aimed to correct for age, sex, ethnicity, and attributes of family origin. Users of the drug who began consuming it in adolescents showed poorer cognitive performance. (Pope, et al., 2003) . A similar conclusion was also found when comparing alcohol use in teenagers who had long term cognitive performance deficits. (Townshend & Duka, 2006)

cannabis for the adult user is a mostly harmless substance. It is debateable whether consistent cannabis usage in adults as any long-term effects. There is no evidence to suggest any links to addiction such as those found with opiates, cocaine, amphetamines or alcohol. However, concerning younger users, there is evidence to suggest that much like alcohol use, the individual can suffer long term cognitive impairment if they regularly consume the substance in these formative years.

There are immense benefits that could be realised with the regulation of cannabis. From a business perspective, it can be cultivated somewhat easily allowing for new businesses and jobs growth. There is also a case to make for the use of medical cannabis products which are already legal in the state of Victoria. But protecting the interests of younger Victorian's must be a priority.

Alcohol is legal for sale and use in the state of Victoria. There are significant penalties in place for businesses caught selling alcohol to underage people. A report conducted by the Australian institute of health and welfare showed that when comparing 2007 to 2001, the proportion of teenagers who

reported having engaged in underage drinking in Australia had decreased from 66% to 62%. According to the alcohol industry lobby group, drink wise, the average age when that young person has their first drink has increased from 14.4 years to 16.1 years. (Drinkwise, 2020). Combining both self and governmental regulation has seen a decrease in the proportion of underage drinkers and an increase in the average age of young people engaging in underage drinking. cannabis, however, remains illegal. As such it is not subject to any regulation. Drug dealers have no reason to adhere to standards regarding the sale of substances to underage people in the current legislative framework.

Anecdotally, many dealers completely refuse to sell cannabis to young people. However, there are no organising bodies of drug dealers and no business bodies to self-regulate. There is no standard of product quality and no consistent dosage. There is also no body set up to enforce any standards. It is trivially easy to use the dark web to have cannabis delivered directly to you. It is almost impossible to police these kinds of sales. Worse still, is that all the proceeds from the sale of the drug go directly to the criminal syndicates that produce them. Thankfully these sales are on the decline for Australians between the ages between 14 and 19, however almost every other age group is increasing (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020). These drugs must come from somewhere and by maintaining a prohibition on cannabis sale, money is being funnelled into criminal syndicates. The demand for these drugs is not decreasing. Parts of the United States, Canada and likely New Zealand either have legalised or will soon completely legalise cannabis for sale. Again, this is a substance that even cursory research can demonstrate in adults has no lasting long-term effects. Prohibition of cannabis instead of hurting organised crime, counter-intuitively has the opposite effect. Increasing demand makes the sale of cannabis more lucrative.

The most effective way to prevent organised crime and prevent young people having access to cannabis is to legalise and regulate the sale of the substance. There has been a campaign run by successive governments and lobby groups that seek to demonise cannabis and people's opinions of the substance will not change overnight. A stop gap measure could resemble what Western Australia, South Australia and the ACT. These states have enacted decriminalisation measures to help curb this problem. In these states a person growing a small amount, strictly for personal use does not attract criminal penalties. Hydroponic equipment is completely legal for sale. Online seed banks make it trivially easy to get seeds imported from overseas. Those enthusiasts who want cannabis for their personal use, grow it themselves which prevents the sale of cannabis and reduces the demand from illicit sources. It is not a perfect system as some people do not want to invest the time and energy in growing their own cannabis, but it is better than outright prohibition. This also means that small producers will not be subject to lengthy and costly legal action as a result of having grown a small amount of the drug.

In summation, although the long-term effects of cannabis are largely unknown, there is little evidence to suggest that there are long term effects when the drug is consumed by adults. There is evidence to suggest that when the substance is taken regularly by an adolescent that there can be significant long-term cognitive impairment. Prohibition means that there are currently no laws that govern the sale of cannabis to anyone. Because it is all illegal there are no standards for the drug. The demand for cannabis is increasing amongst Australians. In order to protect the health and well being of Victorians, it is my opinion that cannabis should be legalised and regulated like alcohol. However, if this is too much to consider at this point in our history, the decriminalisation of cannabis

like other Australian states should be enacted. Prohibition does nothing but to cause the very problems that proponents of prohibition seek to eliminate.

I would like to close this submission with my own experiences with cannabis. I have struggled with depression and anxiety for years. The drugs proposed by my psychologist have side effects that include nausea, weight gain and a host of other problems. Upon reading a study and speaking with Canadians who use cannabis I decided to give it a try. I thought it was worth a try although I did have misgivings about my money ending up in the hands of criminals. I had some experience with the drug overseas where it was possible to select your dosage and exactly what it was going to do. It was surprisingly easy to obtain cannabis in Australia and I was surprised to learn it could be home delivered. The effects for me have been dramatic. I have not had a panic attack since I started using the drug. My health and well-being have improved dramatically as well as my outlook on life. I experience no side effects and am quite content to sit and listen to music at home. I am sleeping regularly again, and my psychologist has informed me it is no longer necessary to continue treatment. She had informed me that whatever I was doing was working and to keep it up. I felt betrayed by the things I had “learned” about cannabis in school. After doing my own research I found that cannabis was not the demon it was made out to be. I found out the true meaning of “gateway drug”. It is my belief that it is not the cannabis that causes people to seek out other substances, it is the network of drug dealers they now have access to that causes it. By pushing the substance underground, it places the user in a free for all of criminal activity. I fundamentally believe that this substance does have medical benefit and should be legal for any adult that wishes to consume it. My want to drink alcohol decreased dramatically too. To be blunt, cannabis is just much more efficient and cost effective. The most poignant thing I learnt was a quote from John Ehrlichman. Ehrlichman was an advisor of domestic policy to the Nixon administration. This administration would begin the “war on drugs”, which Australia mirrored in its own policies. Ehrlichman said, regarding the criminalisation of cannabis:

“The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I’m saying? We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.”

Based on Ehrlichman’s quote, the categorisation of this harmless substance with pharmacologically powerful, destructive and addictive substances, is completely politically motivated. What runs through my mind is the cost of the war on drugs both human and economic. On one hand the billions of dollars wasted policing a harmless substance is an egregious failure of policy. On the other, the amount of people who have had their lives destroyed, not by the substance, but by the resultant police action is a malicious failure of government. I am glad that we are finally looking at correcting this issue and my belief is that one day soon, cannabis prohibition may be as absurd to us as alcohol prohibition.