

## Inquiry into the use of Cannabis in Victoria

Mr Paul Barratt

**Organisation Name:**Australia21 Limited

**Your position or role:** Chair

### 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,Criminal activity,Young people and children,Public health,Mental health,Public safety,Social impacts,Education

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

Academic and research,Advocacy body

**Are there any additional themes we should consider?**

No

**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.

### YOUR SUBMISSION

**Submission:**

Attached please find submission to your Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into the recreational use of cannabis.

**Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:**

### FILE ATTACHMENTS

**File1:** [5f4b648a99eff-Submission to Victorian Legislative Council Inquiry - Final.pdf](#)

**File2:**

**File3:**

**Signature:**

Paul Barratt



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## **Submission to Victorian Legislative Council Inquiry by Legal and Social Issues Committee regarding recreational cannabis**

I write in support of a submission to the above inquiry by Dr Alex Wodak, President of the Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation and a Director of our organisation.

[Australia21](#) is a registered research organisation which was established in 2001 to undertake research into complex multidisciplinary problems that are important to Australia's future. Since 2012 we have been active in undertaking research and publication in relation to the impacts of current approaches to illicit drugs. This work has been led by Dr Wodak, former Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Palmer AO, Professor Emeritus Dr Bob Douglas, former head of the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, and organisational development consultant Ms Lyn Stephens, all current or emeritus directors of Australia21.

We have published four reports on the subject, each of which is available for free download at the links provided:

### [The Prohibition of Illicit Drugs is Killing and Criminalising our Children](#)

This is the outcome of a 2012 meeting of high level political practitioners with an interest in the subject, together with medical experts in the field, people with high level law enforcement experience, and some capable young people who see drugs in their social environment and networks in a way that most Australians from older generations do not.

The meeting agreed with the July 2011 report of a prestigious Global Commission that the international and Australian prohibition of the use of certain "illicit" drugs has failed comprehensively. By making the supply and use of certain drugs criminal acts, governments everywhere have driven their production and consumption underground and have fostered the development of a criminal industry that is corrupting civil society and government and killing our children. By defining the personal use and possession of certain psychoactive drugs as criminal acts, governments have also avoided any responsibility to regulate and control the quality of substances that are in widespread use thereby increasing the potential harm associated with their use and diverting resources from harm reduction strategies which rightly belong in the health and social arenas rather than in the criminal justice system.

[Alternatives to Prohibition: Illicit drugs: How we can stop killing and criminalising young Australians.](#) This July 2012 Roundtable included a group of 22 high level experts and young people, who examined changes in policy in four European countries and considered future options for Australia. These discussions identified a range of ways in which Australian policy could be reset. Some were modest and incremental reforms, while others were more ambitious and would require wide community consideration.

The meeting found that Australia's illicit drug markets continue to thrive. Young people are being encouraged to experiment because huge profits are made from drug markets controlled by powerful criminal networks. Australia's reported rates of cannabis and ecstasy (MDMA)



use are among the highest in the world. Every year, new drug types appear in Australia. But the criminal justice system is unable to stamp out psychoactive drug use. People accused of drug related crimes fill our courts and those convicted fill our prisons.

The collateral damage from efforts to suppress the drug trade continues to disrupt civil society and destroy young lives.

[Can Australia respond to drugs more effectively and safely?](#) This is the report of a full-day roundtable of 17 law enforcement experts — retired judges, prosecutors, senior police, prison and parole administrators, drug law researchers and advocates, conducted at the University of Sydney in September 2015, to consider ways in which Australia could develop safer and more effective policy in relation to illicit drugs.

Very substantial agreement was reached that Australia's current approach to illicit drugs is not working and is inadvertently exacerbating harm. Participants, though, varied in the extent to which they advocated change, and all cautioned that any change, and rationale for change, would need to be understood and accepted by the community and supported by law enforcement practitioners, the judiciary and other key stakeholders.

However there was broad agreement on a vision of what Australia might look like if drug law reform were to be implemented, on some main points to guide this reform encapsulated in a preamble, and on thirteen recommendations that emerged in discussion.

[We All Pay the Price: Our drug laws are tearing apart Australia's social fabric as well as harming drug users and their families.](#) In March 2018, Australia21 held a national summit of 36 experts in drug treatment, drug law, community welfare and the social effects of drug use, to explore the ways drug policies and practices across Australia impact on our society. The purpose of the day-long Roundtable meeting at Victoria's Parliament House was to build on the conclusions of three previous high level Roundtable summits on Illicit drug policy that Australia21 had initiated since 2012.

The meeting found that problems associated with illicit drugs in our community are complex, multifactorial and interrelated, and there was firm consensus among the Roundtable group that some of these problems are more the result of our drug policies than the drugs themselves. The prohibition of specified drugs perversely promotes criminal markets, encourages the growth of prison populations and damages the lives of many Australian families. The group shared evidence of current drug laws directly and disproportionately harming people who are convicted for personal use and possession, as well as having many other adverse consequences for income security, housing, parenting, child protection, domestic and family violence, family breakdown, mental health, employment, crime, social welfare, recreation, road safety and the environment. They noted that drug offences are dealt with inconsistently, so Australians in some jurisdictions are more likely to be negatively impacted than others. The group also expressed overarching concerns about the diversion of scarce human and financial resources from managing health and social issues into drug law enforcement that is unproductive, wasteful and too often harmful. Ultimately, we all pay the price for policies that are poorly targeted and even counter-productive to harm reduction.

In addition to this work, in 2017 Australia21 collaborated with ALDAF (Australian Lions Drug Awareness Foundation Inc.) in the preparation and distribution of [Smarter About Drugs: A conversation pack](#), a document designed to help educators and community leaders facilitate intelligent and informed discussions about drug and alcohol issues. Uniquely, this resource introduces participants to the concept that there is a range of possibilities for taking individual and collective action in a democratic society. The pack can be adapted for use from middle secondary to adults.

We commend this body of work to you. It fully supports the broad thrust of Dr Wodak's submission, which goes more particularly to the issue of cannabis availability and regulation. In particular, our research supports the propositions that

- Neither the demand nor the supply of cannabis is going to disappear. If the only supply is from the black market, some young people seeking cannabis are inevitably going to make contact with suppliers who under current arrangements also provide heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine
- It is the unregulated supply of cannabis which is a threat to young people and the regulated supply which provides some, albeit imperfect, protection
- Regulation of recreational cannabis would have many other potential benefits including mandated package health warnings, help seeking information and consumer product information.
- The use of drugs supplied by black markets is far more harmful than when the same drug is supplied by a regulated market.
- Black markets risk corrupting police and other officials, the law and the financial industry.
- Regulating the supply of recreational cannabis in Victoria is likely to improve the health, mental health, and social wellbeing of citizens who use cannabis use, their families and communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.



Paul Barratt  
Chair  
Australia21