

Inquiry into the use of Cannabis in Victoria

Ms Stephanie Thuesen

Organisation Name: Labor for Drug Law Reform - Victorian Branch

Your position or role: Director of Stakeholder Engagement

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::

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

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

Advocacy body

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

Job creation and revenue to the economy.

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:

1. protect public health and public safety in relation to the use of cannabis in Victoria;
2. implement health education campaigns and programs to ensure children and young people are aware of the dangers of drug use, in particular, cannabis use;
3. prevent criminal activity relating to the illegal cannabis trade in Victoria;

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

Please find attached our summary as to the benefits of cannabis legalisation.

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [5f4b6778c1fcc-Cannabis Report.pdf](#)

File2:

File3:

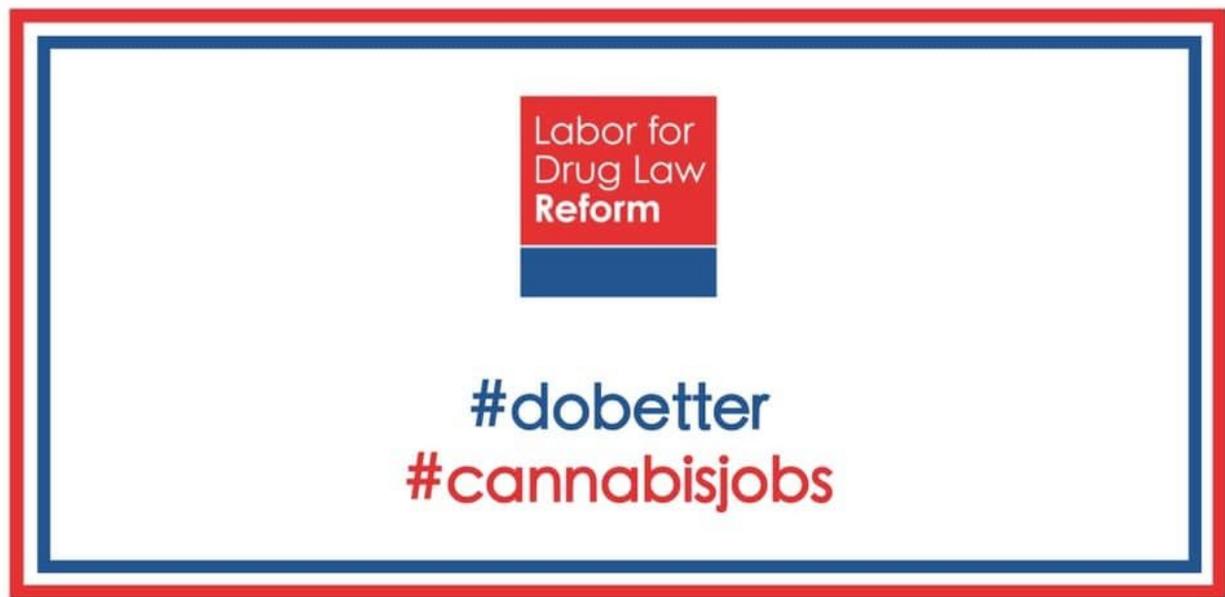
Signature:

Stephanie Thuesen

INQUIRY INTO THE USE OF CANNABIS IN VICTORIA

The Case for Cannabis

Labor for Drug Law Reform - Victorian Branch



Our Position

Labor for Drug Law Reform Victoria are strong advocates for the legalisation of recreational cannabis. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, cannabis continues to be the most widely used¹ illicit substance. Furthermore, cannabis is used more frequently than other illicit drugs with 36% of recent users reporting weekly use.² We note that rates of cannabis use have remained relatively stable over the past decade demonstrating that prohibitionist policies are failing to curb use amongst the community. A recent study conducted by Professor Steve Allsop from Curtin University's National Drug Research

¹ "Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs in Australia", Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol/alcohol-tobacco-other-drugs-australia/contents/drug-types/cannabis>. Accessed 20th August 2020.

² Ibid.

Institute has recently estimated that cannabis use in its current legislative framework, is costing Australia approximately \$4.5 billion per year³. With this in mind, it is our contention that legalising recreational cannabis would not only prevent harms associated with black market impurities, it would also save our economy billions of dollars and create much needed jobs in a time of economic crisis.

The Cost

According to the Curtin University there are \$4.4 billion in direct tangible costs from the current legislative framework, “including crime and criminal justice, hospital and other healthcare costs, reduced productivity and worker absence, and road traffic accidents; and a further \$100 million in intangible costs due to the premature death of 23 people, mostly through cannabis-related road traffic accidents, which resulted in more than 850 years of life lost.”⁴

“Crime, health care, and workplace costs accounted for more than three quarters of the estimate.”

It is the opinion of many harm reduction advocates, professors and legal practitioners that the best way to reduce the harms associated with drug use is to regulate substances. Such a move ensures that substances are regulated and are not cut with dangerous secondary substances such as fentanyl but it also ensures that secondary harms caused by accessing these substances legally are curbed.

According to Professor Alison Ritter AO, 91% of people who use cannabis do not develop a dependency.⁵ With this in mind, it is incomprehensible that cannabis arrests account for the greatest number of illicit drug arrests in Australia.⁶ In the 2017-2018 period there were

³ Allsop, S. “Media Release - Cannabis use costs Australia \$4.5 billion”, National Drug Research Institute. Curtin University. 5 August 2020

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Shanahan, M & Ritter, A. (2013). Intangible outcomes from a policy change: Using contingent valuation to quantify potential stigma from a cannabis offence. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*. 10. 10.1007/s11292-013-9176-1.

⁶ Australian Crime Commission (2019). *Illicit Drug Data Report 2017-18*.

72,381 arrests for cannabis.⁷ Of these arrests, 92% were simply cannabis consumers, not providers.⁸ These numbers were further solidified by the recent Queensland Productivity Commission Report into the state's overcrowded prison system. The QPC "said a cost-benefit analysis found decriminalising the use and possession of cannabis would save about \$850 million, rising to \$1.2 billion if the Government chose to fully legalise and regulate the supply of "lower-harm drugs such as cannabis and MDMA".⁹

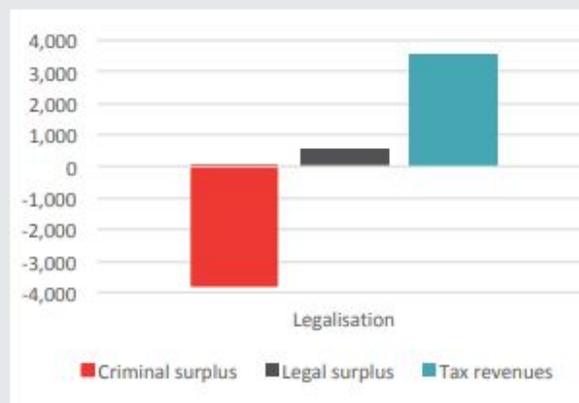
"QUT drug policy expert John Scott says locking people up for cannabis offences is a waste of time and money."

Box 5 Benefits from legalisation of cannabis and MDMA

One of the key benefits from legalisation of illicit drugs is that it moves production from illegal markets to legal ones. Rather than money being channelled into profits from criminal activity, surpluses from production (profits) can be taxed and used for public good.

Under a legalisation scenario for cannabis and MDMA, the Commission estimates that around \$4.3 billion of funds currently being channelled through criminal markets could be made available to fund legitimate activities.

Figure 17 Changes to producer surplus, cannabis and MDMA, net present values



Source: QPC estimates.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "How many cannabis-related arrests are there each year in Australia?", National Alcohol and Drug Knowledge Base. <https://nadk.flinders.edu.au/kb/cannabis/cannabis-crime/how-many-cannabis-related-arrests-are-there-each-year-in-australia/> Accessed 20th August 2020.

⁹ "Imprisonment and Recidivism final report", Queensland Productivity Commission. <https://qpc.blob.core.windows.net/wordpress/2020/01/SUMMARY-REPORT-Imprisonment-.pdf>, pg 22. Accessed 20 August 2020

The Jobs

As of 2019 legal cannabis has created 243, 700 full-time jobs in the United States.¹⁰ We note that this is a 15% increase from the 2019 figures making cannabis the fastest growing industry in the United States. As encouraging as these statistics are, we note that there have been growing pains, particularly in the Californian market in regards to working conditions and venture capitalist takeovers. What has begun to strengthen this market has been the involvement of labour unions, most notably the Teamsters, The United Farm Workers of America and The United Food and Commercial Workers' Union. These three labour unions have made 'significant strides in organizing huge numbers of vulnerable workers in the cannabis industry'¹¹ ensuring stable, full-time employment with healthcare.

"With [the passing of Proposition 64], you had this massive network of workers and owners and people in an industry that are not represented at all, and they come across a number of different challenges," she says. "I've had people approach me that are dealing with pesticides that they don't want to handle, and they've got no protections when it comes to pay. This is a group of people that didn't have anybody to call when they had worker's issues. So, our concern as Teamsters was representing these people — not just from distribution, which is different in each state, but also the people transporting the product, the growers, the trimmers, the dispensary workers and the manufacturers," she adds. "It was really about taking what was an underground, illicit market and helping them understand what kind of protection they could have in a legitimate business that's operated above-ground. It's all about education as well, because this is helping people understand what they can and can't do to their workers."

Teamsters Organiser Kristin Heidelbach

It is our contention that the change must occur firstly within manufacturing. According to the Australia Institute, currently Australia only manufactures two thirds of what we use.¹² The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of good paying, stable union jobs, especially in manufacturing. With this in mind it is important to note that a variety of American cannabis retail, cultivation, extraction and manufacturing firms have reported that employees in these fields can expect an annual salary of between \$59,800USD to

¹⁰ Barcott, B. "Jobs Report", Leafly. <https://www.leafly.com/news/industry/legal-cannabis-jobs-report-2019>. Accessed 20 August 2020.

¹¹ Kelly, K. "Labour Unions and the Cannabis Industry".

¹² Bastian, P and Stanford, J. "Winning a Fair Share: Rebuilding Australia's Manufacturing Base". The Australia Institute. July 29 2020.

\$167,000USD.¹³ There is no reason why such salaries could not be translated to Australia provided that the relevant Australian trade unions have a permanent seat at the table to ensure that the workforces are supported with clear career progression.

In the United States,
over 200,000 Americans support
their families and communities
by working in the rapidly growing
legal cannabis industry.



Legal cannabis jobs are a good way
to boost our economy and improve
our community on the other side of
the COVID-19 pandemic.



#dobetter
#cannabisjobs

¹³ Furnari, C. "Looking for a career in cannabis? Here's what you can expect to make", THC - Helping Cannabis Grow. <https://thcnet.com/news/cannabis-jobs-vangst-salaries-2019>. Accessed 20 August 2020.

Inquiry into the use of Cannabis in Victoria

Mr Michael Aguilera

Organisation Name:Labor for Drug Law Reform Victoria

Your position or role: Co-Convener

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::

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

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

Advocacy body

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

Industry

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: [5f4d00bdb6490-LFDLR Cannabis Submission.docx](#)

File2:

File3:

Signature:

Michael Aguilera

31/08/20

To whom it may concern,



Please receive this letter from Labor for Drug Law Reform Victoria.

We are a group of activists within the Victorian Labor Party (VLP) that are advocating for a harm reduction model of alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) policy within the institutions of the party, Government and law and in tandem with unions, experts and affected communities.

We are well past the historic signalling from the ACT that decriminalisation is the best approach towards dealing with cannabis. A massive overseas market for illegal and legal cannabis products has emerged with loosening restrictions in the United States, and a referendum is being put to the people of New Zealand in 2020. Federal Special Access Schemes (SAS) have directed medicinal cannabis towards those that are suffering cancer, epilepsy, and there has been a double in the number of successful applicants between 2019-2020 (DHHS).

We welcome the chance to communicate with the committee of Legal and Social Issues, and we are proud to join the social and economic argument is being made by sections of health, justice, and global community to argue for a series of changes to the existing regulation:

- That the Victorian Government advocate for medicinal cannabis to be put on the PSB so that the sick people that need it can get it.
- That recreational Cannabis be legalised. We are no longer living in Nixon's era. We need to stop criminalising a section of the population who are doing no harm to themselves or others. Reduced access through 18+ existing regulation, purity standards and public health campaigns are all in place for alcohol and tobacco products.
- That these policies be directed towards creating good union jobs in Victoria. Hemp and Cannabis production could be a tool in the path to recovery from COVID-19.
- That the potential Billions in taxes earned through businesses and trade be directed towards increased ATOD, domestic violence and homelessness services that are driven by Community-specific intervention.
- That our law enforcement and social services be a part of the shift in access and regulation.
- That there be less politicisation and politicians on the stage. We welcome the collaborative approach of the Daniel Andrews Government in creating policy in line with the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre. When he announced the continuation of the trial and he shared the stage with affected communities. People who are affected by poor or misaligned policy should be the centre for reform.

- That all of the recommendations of the 2018 Inquiry into Drug Law Reform be implemented.
- That the Ministry of Mental Health be formally reworded to included 'Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs (ATOD).

Regards,

Michael Aguilera

Co-Convener of Labor for Drug Law Reform Victoria.

This land was stolen and never ceded