



The Hon Jillian Skinner MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Medical Research

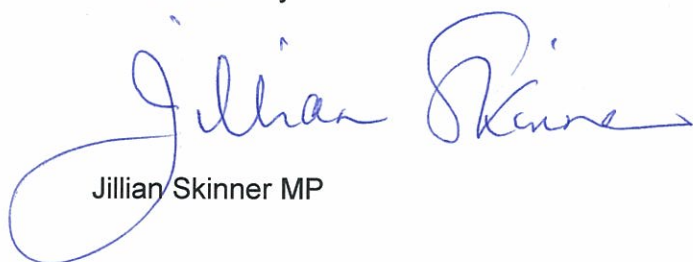


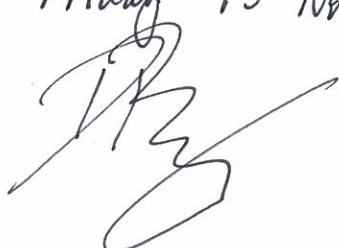
Mr David Blunt
Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Blunt

Please find attached the NSW Government response to the Final Report of the Inquiry by the General Purpose Standing Committee No 4 into *The use of cannabis for medical purposes* for tabling in the Legislative Council.

Yours sincerely


Jillian Skinner MP

Received at 2:25pm
Friday 15 November 2013


NSW Government response to the Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No 4 Report: The use of cannabis for medical purposes

Comment

The NSW Government acknowledges the work of the Legislative Council Committee in considering the issues surrounding the use of cannabis for medical purposes, including their implications for health and legal policy.

The NSW Government is compassionate to the suffering of patients with a terminal illness, chronic pain and AIDS. The Government supports the use of prescription pharmaceutical cannabis products that are approved and regulated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) as these products have been assessed for quality, safety and clinical efficacy.

The Government does not support the use of unregulated crude cannabis products for medical purposes as the potency and safety of these products cannot be guaranteed. The NSW Government believes this will not prevent access to appropriate medical treatment for any patient in NSW, given the availability of safe and effective alternative medications.

The Government notes the limited evidence on the clinical efficacy of cannabis for medicinal purposes, and that based on the limited evidence currently available cannabis use for pain relief is not currently supported as a priority by pain and palliative care specialists.

To more broadly address the issue of pain relief, the NSW Government has developed the NSW Pain Management Plan 2012-2016. This plan aims to improve services to consumers across NSW by increasing capacity and access to service options within existing pain management services in tertiary hospitals. It involves increasing access to expertise in pain management in rural NSW through the opening of five new clinics. It also aims to increase support for primary care through the development of resources and provision of training and education through Local Health Districts and the Agency for Clinical Innovation.

The NSW Government also has a comprehensive approach to palliative care. The NSW Palliative Care Network has over 350 clinicians, carers, health managers and researchers and is currently developing a Statewide Model for Palliative and End of Life Care Service Provision. The model aims to ensure all NSW residents have access to quality care based on assessed needs as they approach and reach the end of their life.

Recommendation 1

The Government supports this recommendation and will write to the Commonwealth Minister for Health expressing in principle support as described.

The NSW Government strongly believes pharmaceutical cannabis products should only be approved for patient use based on robust peer reviewed scientific evidence, including clinical trials. The Government supports the current national regulatory framework for the registration of medicines in Australia, which ensures the safety, quality and efficacy of prescription medicines.

The Government also supports pharmaceutical companies, universities and other scientific institutions conducting research and developing new pharmaceutical cannabis products within this existing regulatory framework. However, the Government notes there are a number of other products already listed on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods and subsidised by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme for treatment of chronic and acute pain, nausea and vomiting associated with cancer chemotherapy and the symptoms of multiple sclerosis and terminal illnesses. Furthermore patients with HIV/AIDS have access to the latest first line

treatments to halt the progression of the disease and to treat secondary infections, either at a subsidised cost through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, or through the public hospital system.

The NSW Government currently provides significant assistance and funding for medical research through the Office for Health and Medical Research (OHMR). The OHMR works with the health and medical research sector to support greater collaboration between research organisations and encourage the development of a priority-driven approach to research and innovation. The OHMR focuses on the translation of research evidence into better patient care and health outcomes for NSW.

The Agency for Clinical Innovation works with clinicians, academics and the community to undertake or source scientifically robust research to establish a strong evidence base for the models of care and clinical practice guides the NSW Government develops.

Recommendations 2 to 5

The Government does not support these recommendations.

The NSW Government acknowledges the use and supply of crude cannabis for medical purposes is a complex issue. However, the Government does not support the medical use of crude cannabis products that fall outside existing regulatory and legal frameworks. The Government believes crude cannabis products are unlikely to be approved as medicines by the TGA while their quality and safety are uncontrolled.

The issue of the unregulated supply of crude cannabis is a major concern to the Government. In contrast to pharmaceutical cannabis products, the potency and safety of crude cannabis is unknown, variable and unregulated. There is also the risk of illegal diversion of any medically authorised crude cannabis product to recreational users.

To realise these recommendations, decriminalisation of cannabis cultivation by patients may be needed or a market may need to be created, either through a government provider or via approved private providers. As noted in its report, the Committee found there are likely to be a range of complex administrative and legal challenges to be overcome for a crude medical cannabis market to operate. The Committee also noted it did not find a solution to these within the timeframe for the inquiry.

The NSW Government believes establishment of a register of authorised cannabis patients and carers raises a range of complex legal, administrative and regulatory issues.

Unregulated crude cannabis can be a harmful drug with a number of known negative mental health and physical health impacts, particularly when inhaled via smoking. It is important the Government does not undermine other initiatives being undertaken to reduce the incidence of tobacco smoking.

The NSW Government is concerned about the harms associated with cannabis use. The NSW Ministry of Health already funds seven Cannabis Clinics to assist patients to reduce or cease their cannabis use. In addition, the Mental Health Drug and Alcohol Office (MHDAO) of the Ministry of Health has published educational material regarding the potential mental and physical harms of smoking cannabis. MHDAO also funds the NSW Alcohol and Drug Information Service line.

In conclusion, not supporting Recommendations 2 to 5 will not prevent access to appropriate medical treatment for any patient in NSW. There are safe and effective medications currently available for the symptoms and conditions that medical cannabis is purported to be effective in treating.