



4 January 2022

Hon Dr Brian Walker MLC
Chair
Cannabis and Hemp Select Committee
Via: www.parliament.wa.gov.au/subportal

Dear Dr Walker

Re: Inquiry into cannabis and hemp

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatry (RANZCP) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Cannabis and Hemp Select Committee. We also welcome the inquiry into the potential to amend current legislation and regulations which apply to cannabis and hemp in Western Australia.

The RANZCP is the principal organisation representing the medical specialty of psychiatry in Australia and New Zealand, and is responsible for training, education and representing psychiatrists on policy issues. The RANZCP has more than 7300 members and is guided on policy matters by a range of expert committees. The RANZCP WA Branch has 550 members, including 423 Fellows.

Medicinal Cannabis/Cannabinoids

Although there is increasing public and medical interest in medicinal cannabis, evidence for the use of medicinal cannabis in the treatment of mental disorders is very limited, and there is no substantial evidence to support its use outside of properly approved research trials for these disorders. In its [clinical memorandum in relation to the therapeutic use of medicinal cannabis products](#), the RANZCP supports more research into the use of cannabis for medicinal treatment, particularly treatment for mental health conditions. The clinical memorandum notes that 'the TGA advises that medicinal cannabis is not appropriate for people with a previous history of psychosis, or concurrent active mood or anxiety disorder. Several studies have linked illicit cannabis use to increased risks for chronic psychosis'.

Medicinal cannabis products should follow the same approval process as other new pharmaceuticals to ensure acceptable standards of effectiveness and safety are met before they are publicly accessible. The RANZCP emphasises the importance of regulating medicinal cannabis using the same rigor and safeguards as other pharmaceuticals and ensuring that any education in relation to prescribing medicinal cannabis is based in the most up-to-date, sound research and evidence. Such evidence activities should be provided by bodies which do not have conflicting interests or pecuniary stakes in the medicinal cannabis industry.

The RANZCP's preferred view is that clinical use of medicinal cannabis, particularly for psychiatric disorders, should occur under robust clinical trials and case studies, conducted under research trial conditions that include oversight by institutional research or clinical

ethics committees with careful monitoring and reporting of outcomes. This will allow the efficacy, effectiveness and safety of long-term use of medicinal cannabis products to be adequately tested. If medicinal cannabis is being used outside of formal research trials, then careful evaluation of this use is strongly encouraged.

Access Issues

The RANZCP is supportive of people from taking part in clinical trials of medicinal cannabis products. However, the RANZCP notes that medicinal cannabis is not covered by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and is a very expensive treatment. This results in a financial barrier for people to take part in trials. Anecdotally, it also prompts some people to find an unregulated supply of cannabis for medicinal use, which is not desirable. Legislation to enable the use of medicinal cannabis should be backed up by an ongoing commitment to fund high quality research.

There are also issues for people who are prescribed products containing tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) if they need to drive. Like many medications, medicinal cannabis can cause drowsiness, and so it is prudent for patients to seek advice from their doctor before operating machinery or driving. However not all people who use medicinal cannabis are affected in the same way, and a patient may be fit to drive but still have THC in their bloodstream. Currently the laws in Western Australia make no allowances for people using medicinal cannabis as part of a clinical trial, with the potential implication that a patient could lose their driver's license and be fined if found driving under the influence of THC. Further, in the event of a traffic accident, the presence of THC may void their insurance coverage. The RANZCP supports a review of these laws so that patients in clinical trials who are functioning well can be treated with products containing THC and no longer be at risk of criminalisation.

Industrial Hemp

The RANZCP understands that industrial hemp is a versatile crop that can be used in a variety of products. It is a useful, biodegradable product that uses minimal resources, so is relevant as part of a sustainable future. However, we are unable to comment on the potential benefits and risks for human consumption.

Final comments

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. Should you have any queries about this submission, please contact our Senior Advisor, Policy, Advocacy and Educational Development,

Yours sincerely

Professor Megan Galbally
Chair, RANZCP Western Australian Branch Committee