

MEDIA RELEASE

Legal cannabis too risky a proposition to entertain

A proposed bill to legalise cannabis for recreational use must be shelved to avoid more people using the drug and suffering health conditions as a result.

In a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee examining the Bill, the Australian Medical Association says there are many short-term and long-term risks posed by recreational cannabis.

AMA President Professor Steve Robson said cannabis use can have a range of negative health impacts and any increase in use could also lead to ill-health for more Australians and impacts on Australia's health system.

"Legalising cannabis for recreational purposes sends the wrong signal to the public, and especially to young Australians, that cannabis use is not harmful," Professor Robson said.

"We know from a recent systematic review that there was an increase in acute cannabis poisoning post-legalisation in the US, Canada, and Thailand.

"We also know there are already many Australians suffering detrimental health outcomes caused by recreational cannabis use. We see poor mental health outcomes from cannabis use including anxiety, panic attacks, paranoia, memory loss and an increased incidence of schizophrenia.

"Cannabis use can lead to physical ill-health conditions such as bronchitis or cancer, cardiovascular system damage, and impaired reaction time and brain function."

The submission says while cannabis use should not be legalised, the current approach to cannabis regulation could be improved.

"First and foremost, cannabis use should be treated as a health issue, not a criminal issue," Professor Robson said.

"Criminal penalties for personal cannabis use can add to potential health and other risks to which cannabis users are exposed. Harm reduction measures should instead be used such as court orders requiring counselling and education, or attendance at 'drug courts' which divert users from the criminal justice system into treatment".

The submission also expresses concerns that people may use recreational cannabis products to self-medicate and urges patients to speak to their doctor to discuss better treatment methods.

"Australia already has an existing, high-quality process for assessing the safety, quality, and efficacy of therapeutic products through the TGA," Professor Robson said.

"The evidence base for the use of medicinal cannabis products is limited. For most conditions, there will be more evidence-based treatments available through a doctor or allied health professional that patients should explore before self-medicating on cannabis products."

Read the AMA's submission

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