



Medicinal cannabis FAQs

What is cannabis?

Cannabis is made from the dried flowering heads and leaves of a plant called *Cannabis sativa*. Cannabis contains a complex mix of approximately 60 unique 'cannabinoids' along with many other chemical compounds. The main active ingredient responsible for the 'high' produced by cannabis is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Other related substances in cannabis include cannabidiol (CBD) and cannabinol (CBN), both of which have quite different pharmacological effects. Other compounds include the cannabivarin and cannabichromenes. These are collectively known as cannabinoids. Different strains of cannabis produce different amounts of these chemical constituents.

What is medicinal cannabis?

'Medicinal cannabis' is a term that refers to preparations made from crude or raw cannabis. Crude cannabis is a difficult drug for doctors to prescribe because the dose and potency of the drug in each case is not tested or known. Pharmaceutical preparations of cannabis use modified active components of cannabis in medical formulations, which maximise the therapeutic benefit and minimise side effects. Pharmaceutical preparations, such as a tablet, capsule or spray, mean that the dose and strength of the preparation can be controlled and standardised.

What are the benefits of medicinal cannabis?

There is not a great deal of quality research available to confirm the medical uses of medicinal cannabis, but preparations have been used with some success for symptom relief such as reducing the spasticity in Multiple Sclerosis, as an appetite stimulant for cancer and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) related wasting, and to relieve cancer chemotherapy induced nausea and vomiting. There is also some

evidence that it may be useful in the treatment of seizures.

What are the side effects of medicinal cannabis?

The acute side effects of cannabis include vomiting, impaired coordination and performance, anxiety, suicidal ideation and psychotic symptoms, as well as impaired ability to drive. Chronic cannabis use is associated with a number of negative health and social effects including increased risk of respiratory diseases associated with smoking, cancer, mood disorders, exacerbation of psychotic disorders in vulnerable people, decreased memory and learning abilities and decreased motivation in areas such as study, work and concentration. The side effects of cannabis when used for medicinal purposes are not well understood.

What is the current legal status of medicinal cannabis?

In February 2016, the Australian Government amended the Narcotics Drugs Act 1967 to allow cultivation of cannabis for medicinal or scientific purposes under a national licensing scheme, which is expected to commence in late 2016. The Commonwealth will be responsible for issuing these licences and growers must meet strict rules to obtain a licence. The changes do not legalise the growing of cannabis for non-medical purposes.

Does the legalisation of medicinal cannabis mean that it is legal to smoke cannabis?

No, cannabis is still a highly regulated drug in Australia and its use and supply is controlled or prohibited by a number of Commonwealth and State and Territory laws.



Does this mean I can grow my own medicinal cannabis legally?

No, there is no change to Commonwealth or State and Territory laws around cultivation for recreational use. The recent changes to Commonwealth laws are not designed to permit the personal or home cultivation of cannabis for use in medical conditions.

How do I obtain medicinal cannabis?

Medicinal cannabis will be a prescription only product. It will only be permitted for a doctor to prescribe or a pharmacist to dispense cannabis-based products.

Can I get a prescription for medical cannabis from my doctor?

From 1 November 2016 your doctor can prescribe a cannabis-based product subject to strict conditions, including obtaining permission from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and the Western Australia Department of Health. Only some medical conditions will be suitable for approval to use cannabis-based products.

How long will it take before medicinal cannabis products are on the market?

Cannabis-based products made from Australian grown medicinal cannabis crops could be available as early as 2017. Which products will become available will depend greatly on product safety and quality, medical research, and commercial producers

Why don't we just import medicinal cannabis products?

Cultivation of cannabis is subject to strict international controls so the global supplies of cannabis for medicinal purposes are relatively scarce and expensive. The national changes will allow Australia to develop a safe, legal and sustainable local supply of cannabis for medicinal and scientific purposes.

What is the WA Government doing?

Cultivation of cannabis is subject to strict international controls so the global supplies of cannabis-based products are relatively scarce and expensive. The national changes will allow Australia to develop a safe, legal and sustainable local supply of cannabis-based products for medicinal and scientific purposes. From 1 November 2016 the importation of cannabis-based products would be possible with a doctor's prescription. The usual regulations relating to controlled drugs will apply, as well as Commonwealth laws on importing restricted products from overseas.

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