

Collated submission made on behalf of 235 people on the Misuse of Drugs (Medicinal Cannabis) Amendment Bill

21 March 2018

To the Health Select Committee,

This is a collated submission on the The Misuse of Drugs (Medicinal Cannabis) Amendment Bill made on behalf of 235 members of the ActionStation community who contributed through a website form. These submissions come from people right across the country, from different political backgrounds.

All individual written comments of the contributors are appended in full. Many of these people shared personal stories that demonstrate their reasons for supporting compassionate legal reform around the use of medicinal cannabis.

We understand you are likely to be receiving a large number of submissions on this issue, and so we have done our best to collate and summarise the themes from people's comments and have included a selection of quotes below.

Who are we?

ActionStation is an independent, crowdfunded community campaigning organisation representing over 180,000 New Zealanders acting together to create what we cannot achieve on our own: a society, economy and democracy that serves all of us - everyday people and the planet we love.

Participants in this collated submission come from around New Zealand. While a majority voted Labour and Greens in the last election the submissions also came from people who voted New Zealand First and National.

As part of this submission, we ask you to note that over 6000 members of the ActionStation community in 2017 called on the government to allow doctors to be able to prescribe medicinal cannabis. This shows the wider support in our community for safe access to medicinal cannabis for those in need.

The majority of New Zealanders support law reform for medicinal cannabis

Opinion polls consistently show that over 70% of New Zealanders are in favour of cannabis law reform.¹ Making cannabis in its raw form safely accessible for people with valid medical needs is a step that most New Zealanders can understand and will support.

¹ [Colmar Brunton poll shows overwhelming support use of medical marijuana](#), 1News, 2016

The recommendations we ask you to consider

Labour's draft changes to the Misuse of Drugs (Medicinal Cannabis) Amendment Bill will set 'minimum product quality standards'. In the future this could allow for the domestic cultivation and manufacture of a wide range of medicinal cannabis products. The government have said they intend to do this but this will likely take years.

In the meantime the draft Bill will give a legal defence to someone with a terminal illness prosecuted for possession of cannabis.

This is a good start, but will not benefit the majority of people who rely on cannabis products to treat chronic pain or illness. Our community recommends adding the following steps:

1. The Government has signalled setting up a domestic market for medicinal cannabis products. We support a domestic market but it **must provide a wide range of patients access to a comprehensive range of products**.
2. The legal defence **should also apply to people who suffer from severe and debilitating illnesses and allow them to possess raw cannabis** - not just those with terminal illnesses;
3. **The legal defence of supplying raw cannabis for agreed medical reasons should include family members** or others supporting someone who is ill - not just the patient;
4. At least until a domestic market is supplying good products, **allow patients to cultivate cannabis plants for their own use**, for agreed medical purposes, so they are safe, have a secure supply and have dignity.

These recommendations were drafted in consultation with the NZ Drug Foundation.

Below are personal stories, insights and comments from the ActionStation community in support of these recommendations

Main concerns and reasons for supporting the recommendations

The submissions from the ActionStation community were from people who:

- have personal experience of chronic pain or debilitating illness and struggle to find relief without medicinal cannabis products;
- see the suffering of others and the benefits medicinal cannabis could bring, or has brought;
- are concerned medical professionals;
- wish to see the separating of valid medical needs from the illegal activities;
- wish to see more compassionate, common-sense laws that meet the needs of twenty-first century New Zealand;
- people who have had, or have seen the negative side effects of pharmaceutical drugs;
- are inspired by potential new economic opportunities of cannabis products;

- see evidence of successful reform in other countries.

From people who have personal experience of chronic pain or debilitating illness and struggle to find relief without medicinal cannabis products.

I suffer from Chronic Pain myself which cannot be remedied any other way so I would very much like to be able to access something that could remedy my Chronic Pain.

- Patricia

I am a person who has had 4 operations for Cancer and chemotherapy, as well as an operation for surgical hernia. To add to the list I suffered from HepC. During all of this I found the (illegal) use of the occasional smoke of benefit both physically and mentally - far more beneficial than the legal drugs I was given. Other people I have spoken to have expressed the response.

- Paul

I suffer from a chronic pain and fatigue condition. This involves constant pain with bad patches that leave me crying and helpless ... I have tried too many prescription medications to count (including opioids, proven to be incredibly inefficient at managing chronic pain - in fact, it essentially makes it worse) and none of them scratched the surface of my pain. I support legalised cannabis for medicinal use as it is the only thing that helps me live a somewhat normal life. Marijuana is the only thing that has improved my quality of life over the last four years since my journey through this condition started.

- Lisa

I had an motorbike accident 25 years ago am now a incomplete paraplegic wheelchair bound today. I have had bad effects from use of prescribed medication in the past... Since I have been medicating myself with Hemp products and smoking weed I am more at ease with life in general loving the changes and pain free days.

- Makere

I suffer with endometriosis, an incurable disease that affects 10% of women. There are many awful symptoms of this disease but the biggest one for me is debilitating pain every month for a minimum of two days... As someone who grew up with a family member addicted to prescription pain medication, I have a strong aversion to habit forming medication, and I find it unacceptable that there is no other legal option for me to control the pain without the negative side effects. Cannabis has been proven in many studies to be a safe, non-habit forming pain relief with next to no side effects. I believe that affordable Cannabis should be an option for all New Zealanders with a chronic pain illness or disease.

- Jessica

People who see the suffering of others and the benefits medicinal cannabis could bring, or has brought:

My grandmother had Parkinson's which she suffered with for years before her death She once asked me for an 'LSD joint', she quickly corrected herself, 'I mean a marijuana joint'. I asked her if she thought it would help and she said "absolutely, much better than the medication I'm allowed." She was a conservative woman, so to hear her say this, it blew me away and led me to believe she was tired of the adverse side-effects of her prescribed medication.

- Ryan

My partner suffers from anxiety and would like to try CBD oil instead of relying on pharmaceutical drugs which have a number of side effects. It is inhumane to limit the scope of medical cannabis to terminal cases only. It should also be available to those with chronic conditions, that a medical professional believes can be made better with medical cannabis. Those with Tourettes, Parkinson's, MS, seizures, muscle spasms, anorexia, cerebral palsy, Crohn's, fibromyalgia, glaucoma etc. would all be excluded under the narrow parameters of this Bill.

- Mike

Being the Aunt to a person who has nothing but chronic pain due to Hypermobility and cannot get out and about much as it causes the pain to become unbearable, and has lived with this ongoing pain day in day out for at least 40 years, I would love to see this to become available for people in chronic pain so they can enjoy some pain free time.

- Jacque

I've experienced first hand someone dear to me suffering on-going chronic pain following a serious accident; and battling back from subsequent oxycontin addiction. I simply cannot comprehend how anyone would oppose the proposed changes if ever they had seen a loved one in pain or dealing with serious long term illness.

- Amanda

I speak on behalf of a friend who has suffered chronic pain for many years. Doctors, specialists and others have not been able to help, but medicinal cannabis gives relief. However, obtaining and using cannabis means that she has to break the current law; she is now unable to travel (because she cannot carry cannabis with her); she has no way of knowing or controlling the strength of the cannabis she uses. I know her story well, but I also know that she is not alone. It is very important that the proposed law change be made more broad and useful, and the recommendations suggested are good.

- Nan

I support more compassionate laws for medicinal cannabis because my daughter would really benefit from using it. She can't hold a job and struggled attending her course last

year because of constant back pain, clicking bones, headaches, sometimes migraine, nerve pain, nerve sensation, restless leg, pins and needles, fatigue, and sensitive skin. She is only 25 years old. I believe medicinal cannabis will truly help with her chronic pain and improve her quality of life.

- Sharon

I am convinced that it would've been of great benefit to my husband but unfortunately we've experienced that there wasn't one Doctor who was willing to help my husbands pain and suffering by prescribing him Medicinal Cannabis Sativex.

- Lana

My mother suffers from anxiety, depression, chronic pain and insomnia. Her life would be so much easier and pain free with medicinal cannabis but instead she takes hundreds of different pills with varying bad side effects and long trial periods of testing what's right for her when medicinal cannabis could cure it all!

- Ana

I know someone who suffers from chronic pains. The use of cannabis actually motivates them and allows them to not feel pain so they can be productive and do the things they want and can contribute in society.

There needs to be an allowance to not just help people dying. That seems pointless and kind of heartless. It's like saying we will wait till you are dying then you can get some help. Let's have a useful, helpful and efficient approach to this. Fear has ruled the government and a lot of people's understanding for far too long. I used to be one of those people too!

- Lyeta

People just don't understand what it is actually like to be constantly in pain, not being able to just take some panadol or ibuprofen to make the pain go away to be able to sleep, and then lack of sleep makes the pain worse causing you to also lower your resolve. Being able to grow enough cannabis for the sufferer's own use, therefore removing the majority of the cost is the best move that can be made at this point in time to help those that need something to change as they currently cannot afford to have a normal or close to the normal quality of life.

- Daniel

From people who work in the health sector:

As a medical physician I believe patients with severe illnesses who are likely to obtain benefit from medicinal cannabis should have reasonable access to a high quality product at a low or subsidised cost.

- Tim

I am a registered nurse working in an acute environment with a majority patient demographic of oncology and trauma patients. For patients who are in ongoing chronic pain/incapacity for whichever reason, I endorse the legal use of CBD (medical cannabis) for pain relief and symptom alleviation. Medical cannabis has been demonstrated to manage pain relief equivalent to opioid pain relief efficacy, without the opioid side effects.

- Anna

Forty years experience as a nurse has brought me into contact with a lot of people. In situations where medicinal cannabis can provide relief from chronic pain (and consequently the associated debilitating conditions) and restore a level of functioning that enables people to enjoy life again and contribute to their families and communities, I support this as an option for legitimate use in NZ. I urge the Select Committee and all who are contributing to the formation of new laws around use of medicinal cannabis in New Zealand to remember these people and show empathy and compassion for their plight.

- Maria

As an ex-Comprehensive Registered Nurse I have always taken a strong stand against illegal drugs and still do, which is why I am asking for a change of Law to enable those of us who suffer from uncontrolled pain to receive relief thus a life we can enjoy not endure.

- Rhonda

I am a registered nurse specialising in mental health, so I am well aware of the abuse of drugs and the problems associated with this. A review of our current system, with regards to the misuse of drugs is vitally important for the well being of New Zealanders. It is abundantly clear that the "war on drugs" (although well-intentioned) is a complete and utter failure.

- Steve

I am a nurse, I deal with people and their illnesses every day. Please make it more available for people's needs.

- Maureen

People who don't want people who are ill to be made criminals:

The New Zealand Police, and our court system, have much more important tasks to perform than pursuing these harmless people. They should not be harassing those who are typically seriously unwell and for whom other pain-relief options may have failed.

- Ian

I have friends who use medical cannabis for controlling pain. It is one of the most useful tools they have to manage pain. They are not criminals and deserve not to be seen as such in the eye of the law.

- Megan

I have fibromyalgia and cannabis is the only thing that gives me and so many others a quality of life back that's just impossible without yet we're forced to choose between our health or our core values in breaking the law.

- Rhiannon

I had a back injury a few years ago and I was prescribed opiate pain killers which worked for the pain but were very addictive ... a person I know suggested I try cannabis and I did and it was a fantastic alternative to opiates without all the nasty side effects. The problem is it's illegal to purchase and possess cannabis so it was hard for me to obtain to use in conjunction with my physio exercises ... also my place of employment has drug testing and even though I stopped using cannabis on return to working, it was still in my system.

- David

I have a friend in her 70s, whose "restless leg syndrome" caused her constant acute pain, and inability to sit or to sleep. She put up with this for three years. She tried every medicine, therapy, pain clinic, and counselling that she could access, but without success. She seriously contemplated suicide. Finally she tried cannabis, baked in cookies, and found instant relief. That was two or three years ago. Now she has a good quality of life but has to break the law to continue it. Because she lives in another town and could not take cannabis on the plane, I too had to break the law when she visited, securing a few grams of the drug and storing it in my refrigerator. Neither of us has ever broken the law in our long lives in any other way, and I am intensively resentful that we should have been forced to do so now.

- Kerr

People wishing for more compassionate, common-sense laws that meet the needs of twenty-first century New Zealand:

More compassionate laws would enable a significantly better quality of life for sufferers of severe and debilitating illnesses while relieving some of the stress which their illnesses inevitably place on the families who are their caregivers.

- Lynn

There are so many uses for medical cannabis, not just for those who are terminal but for those with chronic conditions as well. A caring and compassionate society would consider all those who are suffering, not just a very limited few. If we trust our doctors to prescribe opiates (which are highly addictive and kill many people every year), then we should be able to trust them to prescribe cannabis to anyone that they feel would benefit from it.

- Mike

I believe for many people it is the most effective medication and without many of the side effects of pharmaceutical drugs. It seems an anomaly that NZ can grow and export it to other countries for medicinal purposes. If legalised the price of medicinal cannabis may be prohibitive so it should be subsidised or people should be allowed to grow their own. Time is of the essence for sufferers.

- Patricia

Cbd oil and medicinal marijuana have been proven effective in the management of chronic pain and many other ailments. A way better alternative to addictive opioid pharmaceuticals. The pharmaceutical companies profits should not take priority over the health and well being of the populace.

- Serena

Look at the great success of patients in other countries. NZ is a progressive nation, and it's time we get with the times.

- Matthew

No benefit to myself - I understand the medical benefits of Cannabis and criminalising people who are trying to relieve their own suffering is just plain cruel and inhumane.

- Sophia

In the spirit of Helen Kelly and to all those suffering from cancers that would be alleviated by cannabis, we should legalise this very helpful medicinal plant.

- Tui

I want to know that this medicinal is available to my family and community in a sensibly regulated environment. I do not want to end up as a number of family members of seriously ill New Zealanders have, facing severe legal repercussions in the event that I have to go about obtaining a palliative like cannabis for someone for whom I am responsible, while the current total prohibition remains in place; which I would most certainly do, were I to find myself in the same position as these blameless folk now facing charges.

- Cathleen

It saves lives and offers hope in hopeless situations.

- Eileen

I believe all citizens of NZ should have access to the most appropriate form of pain relief whether medically prescribed or sourced privately as in cannabis. It should be a human right in this country to be able to live without pain - particularly in the case of terminal illness - and not expect to have to face criminal charges.

- Susan

From people who have seen the negative experiences from the side effects of pharmaceutical drugs:

I have this week found out that my first born son who is married with three young children has stage 4 cancer. He has just been prescribed morphine which makes him feel nauseous.

- Jessica

I suffer from incurable non Hodgkin's lymphoma. Prescription painkillers have some bad side effects that cannabis does not have.

- Murray

I suffer from Endometriosis which is causing chronic pain most days. Taking painkillers affects my liver, stomach and brings a different pain. Painkillers are addictive and are not natural for my body. More compassionate laws would allow for a better more sustainable lifestyle for all sufferers of illness and chronic pain.

- Marine

Please consider those in chronic pain who don't want to take pharmaceutical drugs. They don't want to get high, they just want to feel normal and CBD products could help them greatly. Until such time as such products are legally available and have been adequately tested, you could legalise plant cannabis for medicinal use for the home user. Studies have proven time and again any damage to persons and society from cannabis use is greatly overshadowed by the harm done every day by alcohol.

- Monica

From people who are older:

I would like to be able grow and smoke a couple of cannabis plants ..for pain relief when I need it, without fear of being prosecuted... I'm 70, and not likely to abuse the laws,nor do I think young people should take drugs

- Lynley

As an eighty-year old suffering from arthritis and the results of earlier injury the relief from pain now requires me to support this initiative.

- Brian

From people who are inspired by the potential for new economic opportunities of cannabis products:

Many countries have made cannabis legal and are now reaping the benefits. NZ has the opportunity to grow and market this fantastic plant due to our unique climate and spaces.

Let's face it dairy farming needs to be on the decline, growing cannabis and hemp is a potential goldmine for this country. Let's not leave it too late.

- Pauline

Producing the product in NZ would be great it would be cheaper for us and prevent a lot of lot of money going overseas witch is better for our nation.

- Chris

There is obviously a market for medicinal cannabis, I believe we should combine NZs ability to grow high quality cannabis with medicinal cannabis. Legalisation can provide jobs for those who have previously grown cannabis illegally and take part in the rapidly growing medical cannabis market. Having a locally grown supply of medicinal cannabis could also allow scientists to do research and effects and benefits.

- Phillipa

There is very little risk in growing hemp, but very many benefits. Hemp could reinvigorate small towns that have lost economic input, utilizing idle land that can grow a cash crop with thousands of uses.

- Hayden

From people who see evidence of success from other countries:

I know that changing the laws on medicinal cannabis works because my son who has chronic pain is able to buy cannabis where he likes in the US.

- Kathleen

I am not in chronic pain myself nor do I know anyone who does, but I have seen and read enough of the beneficial benefits of medicinal cannabis that I believe it should be legalised and funded by Pharmac. Countries like Israel, the Netherlands and some States in the US already do with great effect. It should be on prescription and thus it takes away any gang involvement and financial barriers.

- Cecile

The current criminalisation of many patients choosing to use cannabis illegally is inhuman and illogical. There is also the immeasurable opportunity cost born by those who due to bad outdated drug laws are unable to access appropriate medication. International liberalisation initiatives in Colorado, Portugal, Canada and Oregon have demonstrated conclusively that better approaches are readily available.

- Nicholas

In conclusion

We thank you for taking the time to consider this submission that has been made on behalf of 235 New Zealanders. We wish to be heard in person and make an oral submission.

We hope this supports you, the members of the Select Committee, to have open and bold conversations on this topic and to accept the recommendations that best meet the medical needs of New Zealanders.

Laura O'Connell Rapira, submitting on behalf of 235 New Zealanders.

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