

Health Consumers Queensland submission

Inquiry into Public Health (Medicinal Cannabis Affordability) Amendment Bill 2017

Queensland Parliament

Health, Communities, Disability Services and Family Violence Prevention Committee

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About us

Health Consumers Queensland is the peak organisation representing the interests of health consumers and carers in the state. Health Consumers Queensland is a not-for-profit organisation and a registered health promotion charity and we believe in improving health outcomes for people in Queensland.

Consumers are people who use, or are potential users, of health services including their family and carers. Consumers may participate as individuals, groups, organizations of consumers, consumer representatives or communities.

Our priority focus is on consumer engagement that influences and leads improvements and delivers better health outcomes for all Queenslanders. We achieve this through our Queensland-wide health consumer network, tailored training and skills development programs, and maximising opportunities for consumer representation at all levels of the health system.

Consumer engagement is when health consumers actively participate in their own healthcare and in health policy, planning, service delivery and evaluation at service and agency levels.

OUR MISSION

Health Consumers Queensland empowers Queensland consumers to lead and drive better health outcomes.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

Health Consumers Queensland is committed to:

- Influencing individual and system change in health services through ensuring the consumer perspective is central in the planning, design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation at all levels.
- Partnerships and collaboration with organisations, service providers and stakeholders.
- Quality, safe, affordable, timely and accessible services that deliver the right care, at the right time and the right place.

DIVERSITY

All people have a right to affordable and accessible health services that meet all of their physical, social, emotional and cultural preferences.

Health Consumers Queensland focus on increasing the voices of vulnerable population groups and assist them to understand how they can have a voice in developing health services. With access and equity in mind, we partner with people and organisations with a focus on the following:

- Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)
- Physical and intellectual disability
- Lived mental health experience
- Socially and geographically isolated
- Socioeconomically disadvantaged

In November 2015, Health Consumers Queensland was asked to represent the interests of Queensland health consumers and families on the issue of medicinal cannabis on the Medicinal Cannabis Trials Clinical Steering Committee and now the Neurodevelopmental Disorders Steering Committee, Childrens Health Queensland.

Health Consumers Queensland's approach to this issue has always been informed, driven by and supportive of families having timely, equitable and affordable access to safe and effective medicinal cannabis products (refer to our submission to the Inquiry into Public Health (Medicinal Cannabis) Bill 2016 dated 11 July 2016). We see these values as being very much in line with the intentions of both the State Government's regulatory framework, ongoing policy and lobbying, as well as the intent of Steve Dickson MP's proposed legislation.

We know that families wishing to access these products in an affordable and timely manner are forced to juggle complex health and financial challenges. Often as full time carers on very low incomes, they struggle to meet day to day costs in addition to the out-of-pocket costs of health care and therapies. Few can meet the current costs of legally available medicinal cannabis products in Australia.

Since this amendment was introduced, the Commonwealth have announced the approval of bulk importation of products. We believe this will quickly lead to timely availability, stimulate competition and drive prices down – ensuring consumers should only have to wait a couple of days to access products rather than several months.

We agree with the Minister's recent request to the Commonwealth that these products be placed on the PBS, which would also dramatically improve affordability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Health Consumers Queensland wholeheartedly support the intention behind the Bill, however don't believe the amendment should become legislation. We believe all sides of Parliament have shown themselves to be listening to their constituents and working towards solutions for access. As the voice of consumers we will hold the Government to account for rigorous continuous improvement of the implementation of the legislative and regulatory changes at maximum pace, so that families can access affordable and efficacious products as soon as possible, regardless of where they live in Queensland.