

## Health Consumers Queensland submission

# Inquiry into Public Health (Medicinal Cannabis) Bill 2016

Queensland Parliament

Health, Communities, Disability Services and Family Violence Prevention Committee

Contact:

Melissa Fox

General Manager

[melissa.fox@hcq.org.au](mailto:melissa.fox@hcq.org.au)

PO Box 12474  
George St Qld 4003

Level 9, 217 George St  
Brisbane Qld 4000

(07) 3012 9090  
[info@hcq.org.au](mailto:info@hcq.org.au)

## 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

## Recommendations

1. **That medicinal cannabis trials be supported by the Queensland Government and delivered in a timely and equitable manner.**
2. **Regulation must be based upon principles of access, affordability and safety.**
3. **Access must be ensured regardless of where in the State that Queenslanders live and which health professionals from which they can receive care/products.**
4. **Approvals, administrative and logistical processes must be streamlined and timely.**
5. **Affordable access to products be ensured through compassionate access from a manufacturer, PBS listing (or State Government subsidy in the absence of these).**
6. **Consideration be given to the needs of consumers/families wishing to use products which are not likely to be eligible for TGA approval ie. testing services and some form of legal protection.**
7. **Robust data collection systems are created to capture the benefits and otherwise of all medicinal cannabis products.**

## Background

In November last year, Health Consumers Queensland was asked to represent the interests of Queensland health consumers and families on the Medicinal Cannabis Trials Clinical Steering Committee (MCSC). Health Consumers Queensland has welcomed the opportunity to input into this process, with our goal for trials to be rolled out in a timely and equitable manner.

On 10 May 2016 the Hon. Cameron Dick, Member for Woodridge and Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services introduced the Public Health (Medicinal Cannabis) Bill 2016 into the Queensland Parliament.<sup>1</sup>

The policy objective of the Bill is to create a new regulatory framework under which medicinal cannabis products may be prescribed and dispensed to patients in Queensland while also preventing their unauthorised use.

---

<sup>1</sup> Minister's speech introducing the Bill into the Queensland Parliament  
<http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/tableOffice/BillMaterial/160510/Cannabis.pdf>

## **Access, affordability and safety**

Health Consumers Queensland is committed to quality, safe, affordable, timely and accessible services that delivery the right care, at the right time and the right place.

As such, the regulatory framework in Queensland for access to medicinal cannabis must ensure products are:

- Accessible:
  - Access must be ensured regardless of where in the State Queenslanders may live and which health professionals from which they can receive care/products.
  - We welcome the proposal under the Bill to facilitate access to medicinal cannabis products by those consumers who are not taking part in clinical trials. This access must be considered in a framework that balances safety with compassion and pragmatism. The potential harms must be weighed up against the consumer's current quality of life, whether previous use of other pharmaceutical products have brought symptomatic relief, at what cost to quality of life due to side effects and the current evidence base for the efficacy of the medicinal cannabis product.
  - Approvals, administrative and logistical processes must be streamlined and timely. We hope this aim will be further supported by the federal re-scheduling of medicinal cannabis from S9 to S8 towards the end of 2016/beginning of 2017.
  
- Affordable
  - The goal of this Bill is to increase access to medicinal cannabis, therefore cost cannot be allowed to become a burden to those families with members who have chronic conditions who already bear the weight of out-of-pocket costs whilst being unable to participate fully in employment.
  - Affordable access before or after a trial setting should either be through compassionate access to the products by the manufacturer until such time as the product is subsidised on the PBS, or funded by the State Government.
  - Consumers wishing to gain the benefits of a product outside of a trial setting should be assisted through a Queensland Government subsidy scheme similar to that in Victoria.

- Safe
  - We appreciate the Minister's concerns to protect Queenslanders, as stipulated in his speech to Parliament in May: *"Unregulated therapeutic use of cannabis raises serious concerns, because the product used may have unknown concentrations of cannabinoids and may also contain potentially harmful contaminants. As such, the Queensland Government has decided to establish a tightly controlled regulatory framework allowing medicinal cannabis to be used where the potential benefits appear to outweigh the risks of unwanted side effects"*.
  - However there are a group of consumers (including parents of sick children) who we understand wish to use products which are not likely to be eligible for TGA approval, and therefore will not be able to use these products legally under the proposed Queensland bill. Whilst appreciating the regulatory/ legislative challenge this poses to the Queensland Government, we do ask the committee to consider how these families may be able to access testing services and gain some form of legal protection to use these products if trial/TGA approved products are not accessible, efficacious or affordable.
  - Funding must be provided to gather clinical data from use amongst Queensland consumers of the benefits and otherwise of all medicinal cannabis products.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Health Consumers Queensland applauds the Queensland Government for listening to consumers and families, and for seeking to facilitate access to these products where they may be of benefit.