



# Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee

**Hearing date: 14 February 2025**

**Question taken on notice**

**Directed to:** Australian Christian Lobby

**Received date:** 3 March 2025

## 1. **David ETTERSHANK, p. 28**

### **Question asked:**

Would you like to provide us with a question on notice or a response on notice to the results of the ACT review so that the committee could then take on board your thoughts?

### **Response:**

In reading through the ACT's *Review of the Operation of the Drugs of Dependence (Personal Cannabis Use) Amendment Act 2019*, I conclude that:

- Victorian's situation and legislation cannot rely on this ACT's review due to the differences in population, size and demography – Victoria's demography is too diverse and complicated. As the most multicultural state in the nation, it is unrealistic to compare the impact of cannabis (and other illicit drugs) use with a much smaller jurisdiction. We cannot deny that certain ethnic and cultural backgrounds are more prone to drugs use and abuse. Decriminalising cannabis use in ACT has less impact on the territory does not guarantee the same for a bigger and more complicated state in Victoria.
- The ACT's review cannot be the only report that Victoria relies on to justify the decriminalisation. It is also important to note that sharing or giving cannabis as a gift remains illegal in the ACT's Cannabis Act (pg. 10), but the Victorian Bill seeks to decriminalise it. It is unrealistic to only look at the ACT's situation of only a few years old, but neglect the decades-long reports and lived experiences of those in overseas, such as in America and Netherlands, where strong evidence points to decriminalising drugs use or soft approach on drugs, or even harm reduction approach, has done the society more harms than good.
- The ACT's review only looks at operation, but not the medical evidence that suggest cannabis use leads to cancers, mental illnesses and other health issues. It is irresponsible to also overlook the facts about road accidents and cannabis use. It would be more 'insane' for this

Committee to overlook these facts and evidence and recommend the Victorian Government to decriminalise cannabis.

- The Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Policy team in the ACT Health is chosen to conduct the review because “it was not heavily involved in the initial development of the Cannabis Act” (pg. 12), but since it is still being part of the Government’s department or agency, the review lacks its objectivity, thus credibility. The review should be conducted by an independent body. Alternatively, this Committee should at least look into other reviews or reports related to the ACT’s situation other than the ACT’s review.
- Only seven representatives from four organisations were interviewed or provided a submission in the ACT’s review (pg. 14), this is unconvincing. More stakeholders would need to be consulted to make the ACT’s review more credible.
- The ACT’s review itself admits its limitations (pg. 14-15), including limited stakeholders, narrow scope, and the review coincided with COVID-19 restrictions. These put the review’s credibility further in doubt.

In light of the reasons above, I strongly recommend this Committee to look into other overseas examples, the medical and scientific evidence relating to cannabis use, and consult further with organisations that run rehabilitation program (such as Teen challenge) to understand the harms and damages cannabis and other illicit drugs have done to the lives of our younger generations.

I’d reiterate my point to suggest that it’s delusional to think decriminalising cannabis for adults’ use would not impact our younger generations. Many of the youth crimes on our streets and mental illnesses among our youth have no doubt related to drugs use. It would be truly ‘insane’ for this Committee to overlook the facts and evidence, and the harms and damages drugs have on our society. These would cost more than a few hundred million per year!