



Burnet Institute
Medical Research. Practical Action.

INQUIRY INTO THE USE OF CANNABIS IN VICTORIA

PRESENTED BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR PETER HIGGS & MS. ASHLEIGH STEWART

ON BEHALF OF

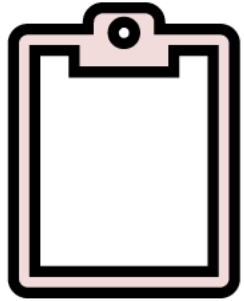
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CURRENT CANNABIS USE IN AUSTRALIA



Cannabis is the most widely used illicit drug in Australia.



36%

(n=8019/22,274)

Of respondents in the 2019 NDSHS reported lifetime cannabis use.



12%

(n=2673/22,274)

Of NDSHS respondents reported recent cannabis use (i.e., use within past 12-months).



36%

Of those reporting recent cannabis use, reported weekly or more frequent use.



41%

Of people said they supported the legalisation of cannabis.



20%

(140/714)

Of young people (aged 16-29 years) surveyed in Sex Drugs and Rock'n'roll reported last month cannabis use

HARMS ASSOCIATED WITH CANNABIS USE

Smoking unregulated cannabis – potency unknown

Organised crime associated with the production and distribution of cannabis.

People less likely to seek help for cannabis use due to stigma associated with use

Estimated costs of cannabis to be \$4.5 billion in 2015/16, with over half of these costs (~\$2.4 billion) related to criminal justice.

In 2017/18 the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission reported cannabis to account for the greatest number of drug related arrests, nationally, with 90% of all arrests relating to cannabis consumers, as opposed to cannabis providers.



2,041,000 Australians USE cannabis

152,000 Australians are DEPENDENT on cannabis

3,422 Cannabis-attributable adult PRISON SENTENCES

The tangible costs of cannabis use amount to \$4.4 BILLION



\$29 million
Premature death



\$714 million
Healthcare costs



\$194 million
Road traffic accidents



\$2.4 billion
Crime



\$560 million
Workplace costs



\$470 million
Other costs including child protection



\$1.1 billion
Imprisonment



\$407 million
Personal crime victim



\$52 million
Legal aid and prosecution



\$475 million
Police



\$257 million
Household crime victim



\$25 million
Community correction



\$62 million
Court

The intangible cost of cannabis use is \$106 MILLION

THE TOTAL COST OF CANNABIS USE IS \$4.5 BILLION

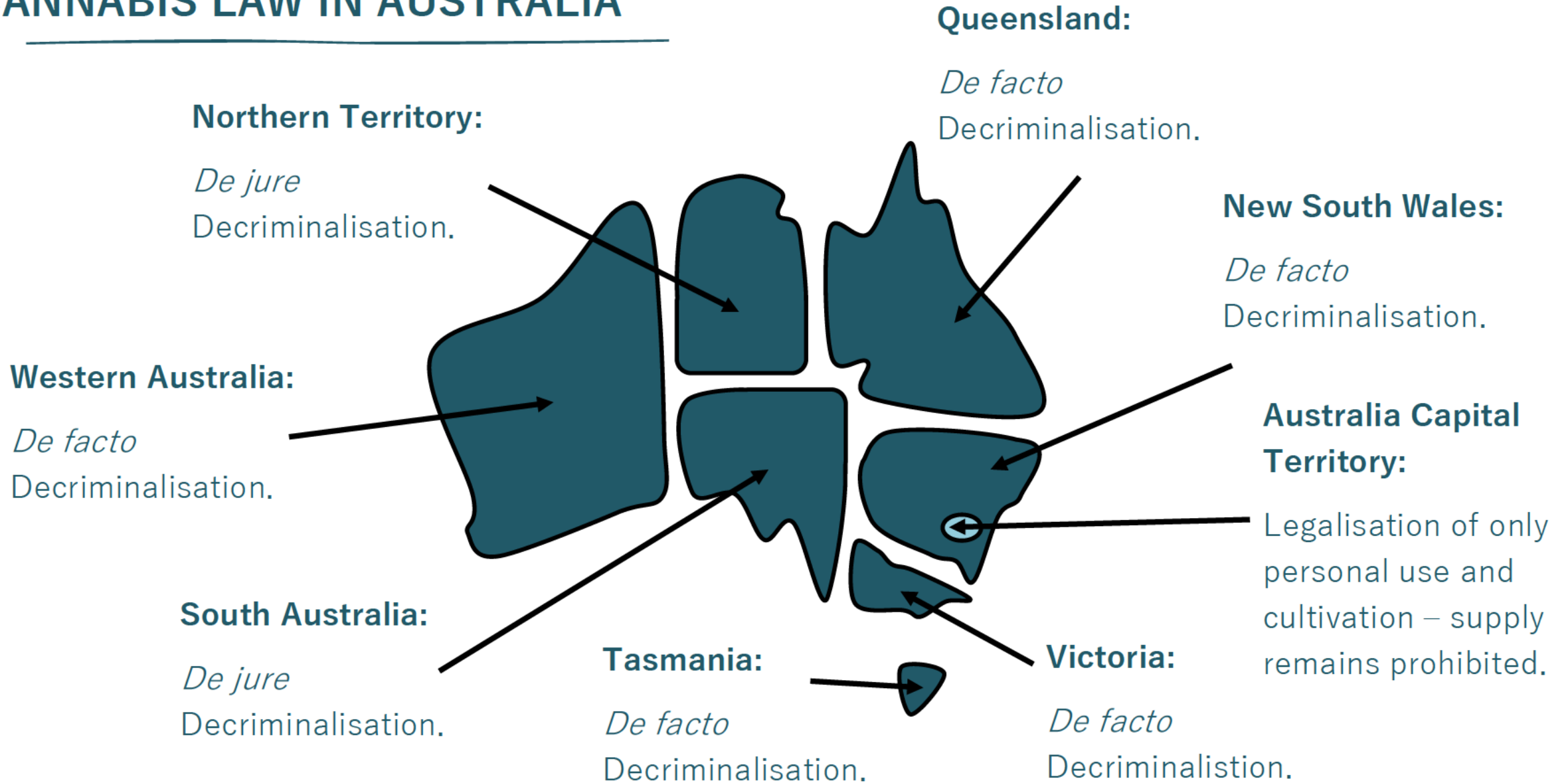
Data from 12-month period July 2015 to June 2016

Whetton, S., Tait, R.J., Chrzanowska, A., Donnelly, N., McEntee, A., Mukhtar, A., Zahra, E., Campbell, G., Degenhardt, L., Dey, T., Halim, S.A., Hall, W., Makate, M., Norman, R., Peacock, A., Roche, A. and Allsop, S. (2020). Quantifying the Social Costs of Cannabis Use to Australia in 2015/16. National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia.

ndri.curtin.edu.au



CANNABIS LAW IN AUSTRALIA

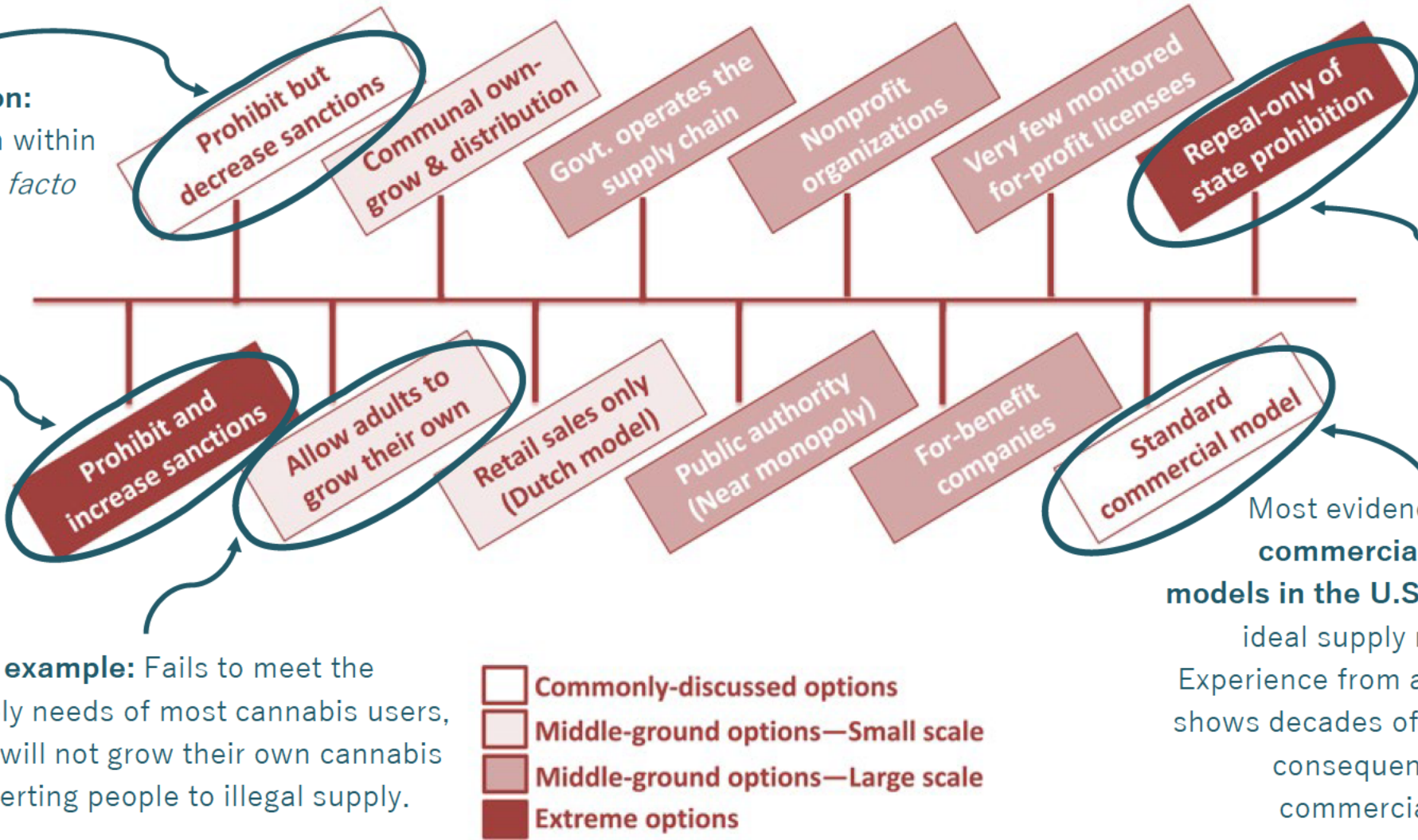


REGULATORY MODELS – Twelve alternatives to status quo prohibition of marijuana supply

Decriminalisation:
current approach within Australia – by *de facto* and by *de jure*.

COMPLETE PROHIBITION

ACT example: Fails to meet the supply needs of most cannabis users, who will not grow their own cannabis – reverting people to illegal supply.



COMPLETE UNREGULATED FREE-MARKET

Most evidence is based on **fully commercialised, profit-driven models in the U.S.**, which are not the ideal supply model for cannabis. Experience from alcohol and tobacco shows decades of effect to revert the consequences of profit-driven commercial models for drugs.

Source: Caulkins, J.P., & Kilmer, B. (2016). Considering marijuana legalization carefully: insights for other jurisdictions from analysis for Vermont. *Addiction*, 111(12), 2082-2089.

REGULATORY MODELS – Twelve alternatives to status quo prohibition of marijuana supply

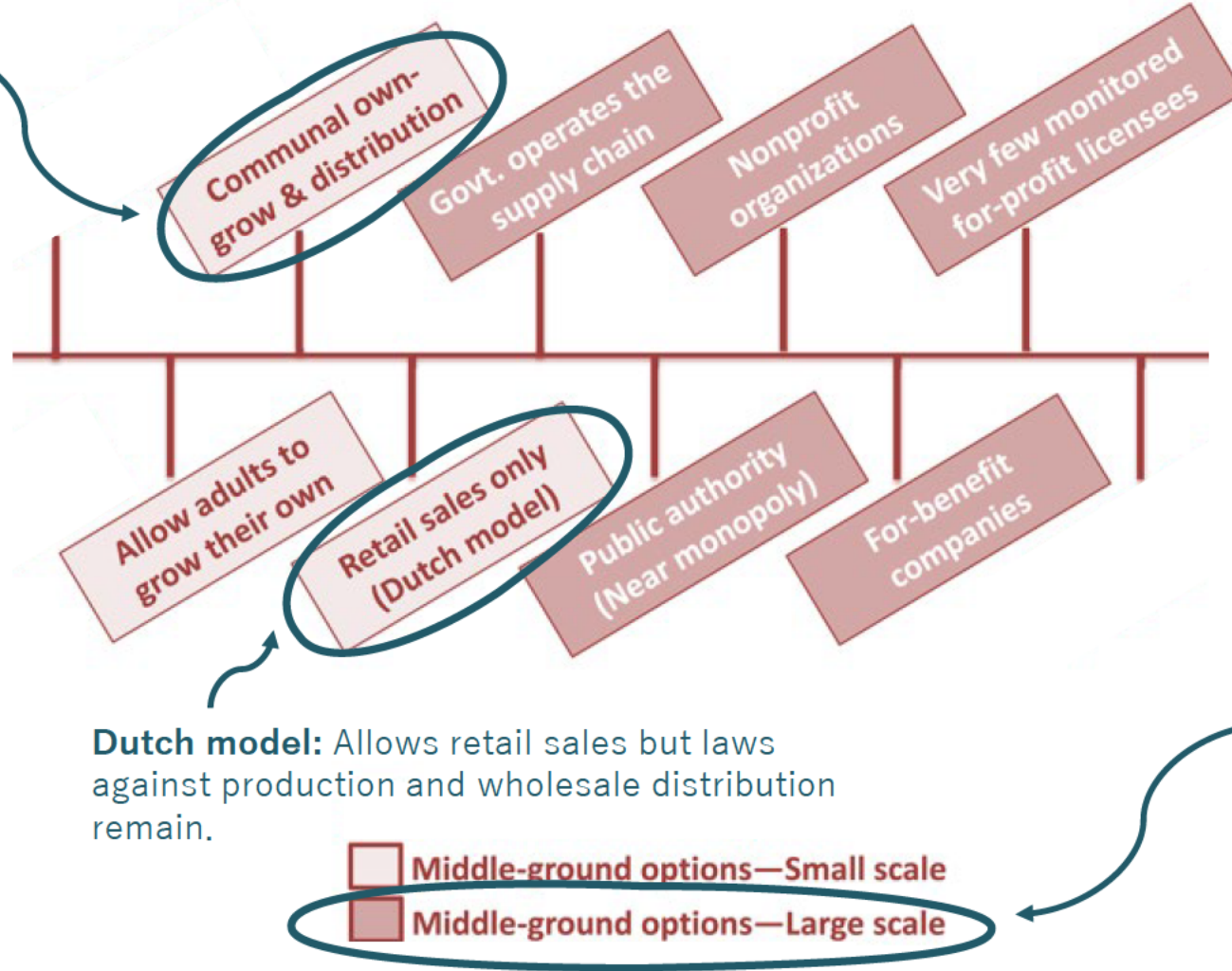
Cannabis Social Clubs:

operate in Spain, Belgium, UK, Italy, Slovenia, the Netherlands and Uruguay.

They allow members to:

- Pool their plants and trade within the club, but not to outsiders.
- One member can cultivate on behalf of others
- Clubs can provide a legal supply to people who lack the time, space or skill to grow themselves.

Cannabis clubs are probably the smallest-scale operation that can undermine a substantial share of the black-market.



Dutch model: Allows retail sales but laws against production and wholesale distribution remain.

Large scale production:

Greater ability to regulate and to collect taxes, and thereby to modulate prices and consumption; but enforcing regulations can be costly, particularly when monitoring compliance.

High taxes and stringent regulations may leave room for the illicit market.

E.g., Supply through pharmacies, or via complete or partial government operated production and supply

Source: Caulkins, J.P., & Kilmer, B. (2016). Considering marijuana legalization carefully: insights for other jurisdictions from analysis for Vermont. *Addiction*, 111(12), 2082-2089.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONSIDER

- Regulated markets already exist for the production, trade, supply, marketing/advertising of prescription drugs, alcohol, and tobacco – **lessons can be learnt from these examples.**
- A **conservative regulatory approach** that limits and monitors the impacts of market changes and restricts the power of private enterprise to shape regulations and controls to maximise profits (e.g., many U.S. examples). **We must avoid** adverse consequences of rampant commercialism, as we have had to do with tobacco and alcohol.
- Any **revenue (including taxation) to be reinvested** into treatment, health, and education campaigns.
- Public health approach that **minimizes the harms** associated with use is crucial, particularly harms associated with criminalizing use and possession.
- Any reform needs to be subject to **strict monitoring and evaluation**, and such frameworks **must be established prior to** the implementation of legislative change.