



Inquiry report urges change to cannabis policy approach

A wide-ranging parliamentary inquiry has called for the Victorian Government to consider altering its policy approach to the use of cannabis in Victoria.

The Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee has made 21 findings and 17 recommendations including that the Government investigate the impacts of legalising cannabis for adult personal use in Victoria.

Established in May 2019, the inquiry received 1475 written submissions, held numerous public hearings, including in the regional town of Beechworth and spoke specifically to young people aged 18-25 at a youth forum held at Parliament House.

The Committee heard from dozens of expert witnesses including organisations and individuals from interstate and overseas.

“The overwhelming majority of stakeholders supported the need for cannabis law reform,” Committee Chair Fiona Patten said.

“Time and time again the Committee heard that the current criminalisation approach to cannabis in Victoria is not addressing problematic use of cannabis and is in fact contributing to the harms experienced by vulnerable groups.”

The Committee has recommended a review of the eligibility of existing drug diversion programs for vulnerable Victorians and an expansion of these programs, particularly in rural and regional areas.

It also believes that a youth cannabis cautioning program should be introduced as a legislated requirement rather than a discretionary policy of Victoria Police and has proposed a youth caution program for low-level cannabis offences committed by people under the age of 18.

“Criminal convictions from minor cannabis offences cause lifelong impacts on a person’s ability to seek meaningful employment and often impedes access to education and even housing,” Ms Patten said.

The Committee has urged the State Government to review the effectiveness of school-based drug education and for it to consult with the health sector, particularly the alcohol and other drug sector, on evidence-based strategies for better promoting harm minimisation in school-based drug education.

“Education and other tools that prevent the early onset of cannabis use or problematic use could be enhanced in a regulated environment where stigma is reduced, and we allow for appropriate education that focuses on more than ‘just saying no’,” Ms Patten said.

The Committee has also called for the Department of Health to assess the funding and workforce needs of the alcohol and other drug sector to ensure it meets the demand of Victorians seeking treatment and that the Government provides ongoing funding for programs to build protective factors against problematic drug use.

“Many of the issues about resourcing the alcohol and other drugs sector raised in this inquiry reflect the findings of the Mental Health Royal Commission’s final report, which was tabled in 2021,” Ms Patten said.

“This report echoes many of them and urges the government to properly resource desperately needed alcohol and drug services.”

Ms Patten said the extensive work of the Committee had laid the foundations for broad reform of cannabis-related policy in Victoria.

“The report and its findings reflect the evidence we received for the need for reform and outlines the key considerations for the Victorian Government if it is to carefully move to a legislated framework for the use of cannabis in Victoria,” she said.

To view all of the findings and recommendations read the [final report](#).

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