

Misuse of Drugs (Medicinal Cannabis) Amendment Bill

Fact sheet

Why is the National Party increasing access to medicinal cannabis?

We trust doctors and nurses and want to give them the best tools possible. Medicinal cannabis is legally available in many of our overseas trading partners where it is mostly used as a second line treatment when standard medical treatment has failed. If it can help ease people's suffering and pass the same tests as other medicines then it should be made available.

What specific changes does the Bill make?

The bill makes changes to the Misuse of Drugs Act to describe licensing requirements for production of medicinal cannabis. Medical practitioner access and eligibility for the Medicinal Cannabis Card are detailed as well as the logistics of pharmacy dispensing.

What sort of medicinal cannabis model is being proposed?

We are proposing a model where medicinal cannabis is treated just the same as any other medicine. Manufacturing would occur under strict licensing conditions with high quality standards just like any other medicine. It would also be dispensed through pharmacies and available to certified users.

And what are the standards?

The existing pharmaceutical grade manufacturing standard is GMP, Good Manufacturing Practice.

What forms of medicinal cannabis will be available?

Medicinal cannabis would be manufactured as liquids or pills and be available in forms such as oils, tablets and under the tongue sprays.

Why would loose leaf cannabis or edibles not be available?

Like many overseas schemes we do not support the smoking of any products and do not support cannabis normalisation or recreationalisation associated with loose leaf. Cannabis edibles can have variable quality and are unsafe for children. It is also easier to monitor and standardise the quality of liquids and pills.

What conditions will be eligible for medicinal cannabis?

The medical community will decide a list of eligibility criteria.

How would people get access to medicinal cannabis?

Access to medicinal cannabis would be at the recommendation of a GP or Nurse Practitioner who would authorise a photo ID Medicinal Cannabis Card. The Medicinal Cannabis Card would be issued and recorded in a medicinal cannabis register

maintained by the Ministry of Health.

Where would medicinal cannabis be dispensed?

Medicinal cannabis would be dispensed by pharmacies in consultation with the pharmacist.

What if the patient is too ill to travel to a pharmacy?

A designated carer would be authorised on the Ministry of Health database to collect medicines for an eligible patient.

Currently, medicinal cannabis products are hard to access and prohibitively expensive. How would this change under the proposed scheme?

Medicinal cannabis availability would be improved with fast track MedSafe consenting, GP and Nurse practitioner authorisation and Pharmacist dispensing. Affordability would be improved with domestic production, market competition and Pharmacist dispensing.

How does this proposed scheme compare with overseas medicinal cannabis schemes?

Some overseas schemes are more liberal and some are more restrictive than this proposal. We studied schemes in other jurisdictions and used those to tailor a scheme to New Zealand.

What penalties would be imposed on people found to be misusing their eligibility card?

The Misuse of Drugs Act already has penalties for unauthorised possession and supply of controlled and illegal drugs.

How is the access part of the proposal different to what we have now?

Access is improved at all three stages of the scheme:

Manufacturing: Activating existing Section 23 of the Medicines Act to provide for provisional consenting will allow products to go to market and then the clinical trials to follow later. This is consistent with international jurisdictions.

Gateway access: Eligibility confirmation is with a medical practitioner or nurse practitioner facilitating easy access to the scheme.

Dispensing: Pharmacy dispensing improves access with ready collaboration with community Pharmacists.

How will this ensure we get more products to market?

There are two main mechanisms for increasing product to market:

1. Regulating domestic production, creating a local manufacturing sector
2. Activating Section 23 provisional consenting

Advice from international experts is that the scheme could be operational in 18 months.

Why do people need ID cards?

We need ID cards because the boundary between medicinal cannabis and recreational cannabis is more ubiquitous and blurred than it is with other medicines. International advice and observations have shown this to be an appropriate measure.