

SURVEY OF AUSTRALIANS KNOWLEDGE, PERCEPTION AND USE OF CANNABIS FOR MEDICINAL PURPOSES

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Introduction and Aims: Several State governments of Australia have proposed changes allowing the legalization of cannabis for medicinal purposes without consultation of the Australian public. This project aims to provide the most detailed survey of the Australian public's knowledge, perception and patterns of cannabis use for medicinal and non-medicinal purposes in the context of possible policy change.

Design and Methods: An online self-complete survey was published using the 'Survey Monkey' service. Cannabis users and non-users aged over 18 years were recruited solely through the Facebook Advertisement Platform. Analysis to date was limited to simple Chi-Square comparisons and analysis of variance between users and non-users.

Key Findings: Preliminary results from 963 completers showed 33% had used recreationally, 55% medicinally, and 12% were non-users. Of those who identified as medicinal users, only 12% reported no recreational use. Recreational users were younger than non-users while purely medicinal users were older and more likely to have a health condition. Medicinal users had more entrenched use and greater likelihood of police involvement. As frequency of medicinal use increased, belief in the evidence base and opposition of further clinical trials was more prevalent. Perceptions of policy and use of pharmaceutical preparations will be discussed.

Discussions and Conclusions: There is a need to better communicate the current evidence for medicinal cannabis use and harm minimisation practices. The use of cannabis for purely medicinal reasons is uncommon, however; this important minority report particularly heavy cannabis use in methods which are otherwise thought to be a health risk.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: The authors have received funding from the Australian Government Department of Health