

Scheme Design for Medicinal Cannabis: 2 November 2017

The Government has made a 100-day commitment to “Introduce legislation to make medicinal cannabis available for people with terminal illness or in chronic pain”.

The Current Situation in New Zealand

Current legislation allows people to access both pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical grade products from their doctor via prescription. This pathway does not restrict access by patient group.

There are, however, barriers to accessing suitable products. This is largely due to the limited range of products available, their cost and the strict controls around the import and export of cannabis products internationally. In addition, some patient groups may wish to access a broader range of cannabis products without prescription (such as leaf cannabis). Opening access to cannabis in this way would require legislative change and we will need to work with you on your vision from a patient perspective.

Description	Discussion Points	Questions for the Minister
1. Context and Scope		
Discussion with the Minister to clarify his vision and views on options to enhance access (from a patient perspective).	There is a wide spectrum of options in this area. The starting point should be the patient outcomes that the government wants to achieve.	<i>What is the overall intent of this policy commitment?</i>
2. Product terminology and quality control		
Medicinal cannabis does not have an agreed meaning and can be interpreted differently.	The term ‘medicinal cannabis’ can be applied to a range of products from pharmaceutical grade through to home-grown.	<i>What is your view on the interpretation of medicinal cannabis?</i> <i>Do you want to increase access to product made to a sufficient standard or access to unregulated product?</i>
3. Scheme design		
Product access Discussion on scheme for access and who is able to access medicinal cannabis through these pathways.	Currently legislation allows access by prescription. A change to unregulated cannabis could be based on particular patient groups such as terminally ill and alternative pathways may need to be developed.	<i>Who would have enhanced access and what process do you want to enable this (use existing levers, introduce new legislation, both)?</i>
Product supply and funding Discussion on a scheme for how medicinal cannabis is/could be supplied.	There are options under the current legislation to improve the availability of product made to a sufficient standard, such as domestic commercial cultivation and manufacture. To enable individuals to grow their own would require legal access to cannabis plants. This raises the question of the quality and standard of unregulated cannabis.	<i>Do you want to enable patients to grow their own unregulated product? How will the product be funded?</i> <i>Do you want to consider how Government can reduce supply costs within existing levers?</i>
4. Next steps and process		
What further advice is required to support the Cabinet to confirm an approach?	Introduction of legislation will require Cabinet approval of the policy, followed by approval to introduce a Bill. There are also non-legislative measures that could be progressed alongside a Bill.	<i>What further information is required?</i> <i>Do you want to include non-legislative options within the 100-day activity?</i>