

**Cancer Voices Australia Address
to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee's Inquiry re:
Regulator of Medicinal Cannabis Bill 2014 – 31 March 2015.**

Cancer Voices Australia thanks the Committee for its interest in hearing the cancer consumer voice and inviting us to this hearing.

Introducing ourselves, Cancer Voices Australia (CVA) is the independent, 100% volunteer voice of people affected by cancer, working to improve the cancer experience for Australians, their families and friends. To achieve this we work with decision-makers, ensuring the patient perspective is heard. Cancer Voices has led the cancer consumer movement in Australia since 2000. CVA facilitates the 30 group-strong Australian Cancer Consumer Network which advocates on national issues identified as important by people affected by cancer – of all kinds.

Cancer Voices has long supported legislative change to enable access to medical cannabis for those who will benefit from its use, and under sensible safeguards. This especially applies to people with cancer, as there is good evidence to support efficacy in assisting the reduction of nausea, vomiting and pain associated with cancer and its treatment.

We recommend that medical cannabis should be available to supplement other currently offered drugs, *according to patient choice with appropriate medical advice.* We are aware that Australia is in a catch up phase with regards to serious consideration about how best to make access possible, and commend all efforts towards this.

Our NSW arm, Cancer Voices NSW, has welcomed the recent initiatives adopted by the NSW Government. This includes making \$9million available for clinical trials of medical cannabis, which all require informed consumer input. We are concerned that they are not examining the use of the natural botanical plant which appears to be the most effective form. The NSW Government has also developed the Terminal Illness Cannabis Scheme (TICS) so that adults with a terminal illness, who choose to use cannabis for symptom relief appropriately, will not be charged by NSW Police. A valuable interim step.

In our submission, we had expressed concern that the Bill could be adding complexity to the process of listing and approving medical drugs by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. Having become better informed since then, we fully support the need for a Regulating body as proposed by the Bill, noting that it covers a much wider field, and does not impinge on the TGA process. We are also more aware of the pressing need to regulate the production and supply of cannabis for medical purposes. We understand that this has been achieved successfully in other jurisdictions.

We can only speak in general terms about the very obvious benefits which cancer and other patients would gain from being able to access this valuable drug in a safe and hopefully inexpensive way. Ms Lucy Haslam can give you a great deal more information based on first-hand experience and extensive research.

We are worried that a lot of debate to date has not been sufficiently well grounded on good information, evidence and observation, let alone the experiences of people who have used medical cannabis to their great benefit and with few side effects. It's a pity we don't have more drugs with these characteristics – and yet, it's illegal. This situation needs to be fixed.

Finally, we commend the inclusion of a consumer on the proposed Board, if that is what "advocacy for patients and other users of medical services" means. We would like to see this clarified in the Bill, as it is vital that the end users, we health consumers, are properly represented at decision-making levels within such a Regulator. Cancer Voices hopes that the eventual outcome of this Inquiry will bring Australia up to speed regarding safe access to medical cannabis, another treatment option which is very much needed by cancer patients.