

Green Choices

Patient Guide

Medicinal cannabis in Australia

What is medicinal cannabis?

Also known as medical cannabis or medical marijuana, medicinal cannabis is the cannabis plant and its constituent cannabinoids (THC, CBD, CBN, etc.) that is used for therapeutic purposes to alleviate symptoms. There are more than 500 chemical compounds found within the cannabis plant, including over 114 different cannabinoids, which are thought to be responsible for most of the plant's therapeutic benefits.¹

Cannabinoids are primarily contained in cannabis resin, most abundantly on the female flower head, which is extracted for use in the manufacture of medicinal cannabis products. These plant cannabinoids mimic naturally-occurring cannabinoids found within the human body which act on our endocannabinoid system, fitting like a key and lock within the cell receptors.²

An unapproved medicine

Medicinal cannabis is legal, however almost all medicinal cannabis products in Australia are currently classified as 'unapproved products' and are not available as registered prescription medicines. Because of this the pathways to gain access are different from usual prescription medications.

This means a doctor can prescribe medicinal cannabis but they need approval first to do so. As part of the approval process they must be able to justify:

- why they are requesting the use of an unapproved medicine and
- how they plan to monitor their patient.

A step-by-step guide is set out on the following pages.

References

1. Ahmed SA., et al. 'Minor oxygenated cannabinoids from high potency Cannabis sativa L', *Phytochemistry*, vol. 117, 2015, pp. 194-199.
2. ElSohly M., 'Chemical Constituents of Cannabis. Cannabis and Cannabinoids – Pharmacology', *Toxicology and Therapeutic Potential*, 2002, pp: 27-36.

Accessing medicinal cannabis

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Eligibility for medicinal cannabis

2



Discuss with your doctor

3



Next steps

1



Eligibility for medicinal cannabis

The following are some of the factors your treating doctor will take into consideration if they are to make an application for medicinal cannabis on your behalf:

1. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE:

Is your condition/illness supported by evidence (clinical studies or research) with the use of medicinal cannabis?

As of 31 December 2019, over 130 conditions had been accepted for medicinal cannabis treatment in Australia, with over 60% of SAS B approvals having been granted for the treatment of chronic pain of unspecified origin.³

Other common indications include other pain conditions (cancer pain and symptom management and neuropathic pain and fibromyalgia), psychological conditions (anxiety, anorexia, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder), multiple sclerosis and movement disorders and seizure management/epilepsy.³

2. Are you taking or have you tried standard medicines which have been unsuccessful in adequately controlling your symptoms or produced intolerable side effects?

If you answered yes to the first two queries, you are potentially eligible to access medicinal cannabis.

Please note: Eligibility does not guarantee approval.

3. Your treating doctor will also consider the possible impact of treatment on your overall life and whether this medicine is appropriate for you. They may consider the impact of medicinal cannabis on your life in regards to:

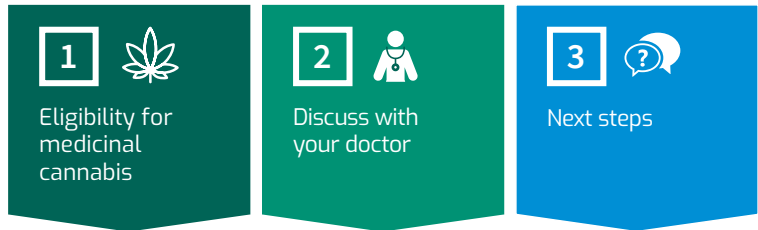
- Operating heavy machinery
- Driving
- Employment testing
- Whether you can you afford this treatment (it is not currently covered by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS))

Remember, your treating doctor is a highly trained medical practitioner and best placed to advise you on medical treatment for your condition.

Take the **Am I eligible?** quiz to learn more:

www.greenchoices.com.au/patients/am-i-eligible

Accessing medicinal cannabis



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Discuss with your doctor

It is recommended as a first step towards cannabinoid therapy that patients see their usual treating doctor, GP or specialist.

Some points to consider:

DO YOUR RESEARCH

You may wish to read appropriate clinical studies online relevant to your condition prior to visiting your doctor. Printing out these studies to take with you to your doctor appointment means you can discuss the clinical evidence with your medical practitioner. Peer-reviewed studies help practitioners better understand medicinal cannabis as a treatment option for your condition.

You can find research relating to various conditions by visiting greenchoices.com.au

HAVE PATIENCE

Medicinal cannabis is still very new in Australia. Most doctors have not been formally trained in prescribing medicinal cannabis, or may not be familiar with the pathways to access, which can be complex. Recognising that doctors who still have questions or need more evidence to feel comfortable prescribing is important. Together, you are more likely to find the best medical outcome for you.

BE HONEST WITH YOUR EXPERIENCE

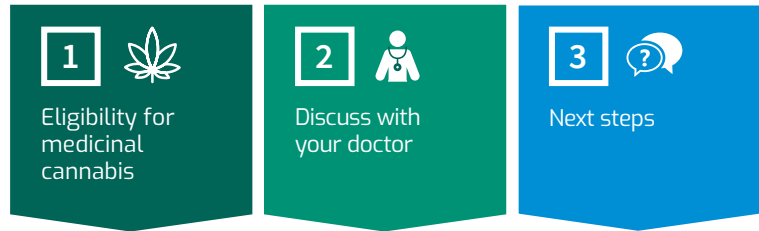
Now is also the time to be honest and advise your practitioner if you've already been using cannabis and any effects – positive or negative from your experience so far.

FOLLOW MEDICAL ADVICE

There are many reasons why a practitioner will not prescribe medicinal cannabis. However, if you believe your doctor isn't willing to prescribe because they lack experience in medicinal cannabis and don't wish to learn more then you could consider section 3 Next Steps.

It is important that you understand your doctor's reasons for not wishing to proceed with medicinal cannabis treatment, as this medicine may not be suitable for you.

Accessing medicinal cannabis



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Next steps

We suggest the following steps:

1. Ask your medical practitioner to also sign up to the [greenchoices.com.au](https://www.greenchoices.com.au) restricted access portal to access comprehensive resources for doctors, including training and free CPD course.
2. Please also provide your doctor with the **Doctor Factsheet on page 5 of this brochure**. Your doctor may also want to contact our sponsor, Little Green Pharma directly on **1300 118 840** or email medical@lgpharma.com.au and they can provide them with any information they need.

MY DOCTOR IS HESITANT OR NOT WILLING TO LEARN MORE

Many practitioners still lack experience and knowledge of medicinal cannabis, and for this reason may not be comfortable prescribing this treatment option. If this is the case for your doctor, below are some options available to you:

OPTION ONE

Ask your doctor if they would consider medicinal cannabis as a treatment option for you if they could get assistance with the application process.

Answer is YES?

Please provide your doctor with the **Doctor Factsheet** on page 5 of this brochure. Your doctor can also contact our sponsor, Little Green Pharma directly, as they can provide information and support with the application process.

Phone **1300 118 840** or Email medical@lgpharma.com.au

Answer is NO?

You could ask your doctor to refer you to an experienced medical practitioner to help them with your treatment. A list of other doctors and clinics that are experienced with the prescribing process for medicinal cannabis can be found at:

www.greenchoices.com.au/patients/find-a-doctor

OPTION TWO

If your doctor is unfamiliar with medicinal cannabis and does not wish to learn more or write you a referral, you can also visit the GreenChoices for more information. A doctor referral to see another medical practitioner is preferred but is not a requirement:

www.greenchoices.com.au/patients/find-a-doctor

Doctor Factsheet

Information to give your practitioner

Medicinal cannabis in Australia

There is a growing number of doctors prescribing medicinal cannabis in Australia:

46,000+

SAS Category B applications approved by the TGA for medicinal cannabis products (at 31 May 2020)¹

130+

Medical conditions approved through the SAS B process²

1,400+

Medical practitioners have gained approval to prescribe Medicinal Cannabis²

74

Authorised Prescribers for Medicinal Cannabis in Australia (at Dec 2019)²

<\$10

The average daily cost of medicinal cannabis is under \$10 per day³



Did you know...

- Any medical practitioner can apply for medicinal cannabis via an SAS B application – you don't need to be an Authorised Prescriber (a special licence) or have formal training. Both are common misconceptions.
- SAS B applications only take approximately 10 minutes with assistance.
- Free RACGP accredited CPD course 'Introduction to Prescribing Medicinal Cannabis' available for Medical Practitioners (normally \$179.95) via greenchoices.com.au
- Personal guidance is available to navigate you through the medicinal cannabis SAS B application process.

GreenChoices is sponsored by Little Green Pharma (LGP), an Australian producer of medicinal cannabis based in Western Australia. The medical team at LGP can assist prescribers with queries related to medicinal cannabis.

LEARN MORE

EMAIL

medical@lgpharma.com.au

PHONE

1300 118 840

FAX

(08) 6323 4697

WEBSITE

littlegreenpharma.com

Contact me Please complete this section and fax to us if you'd like our Medical Team team to get in touch.

DOCTOR NAME: _____

PRACTICE NAME: _____

STATE: _____

EMAIL: _____

CONTACT NUMBER: _____

References

- www.tga.gov.au/access-medicinal-cannabis-products-1 (2 June 2020)
- Senate inquiry into the current barriers to patient access to medicinal cannabis in Australia (31 Dec 2019)
- Freshleaf Analytics (Q3 2019)

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