Fact sheet

Access to Medicinal Cannabis and CBD oil in the Northern Territory

Background/Purpose

The legal therapeutic use of medicines containing cannabis is often confused with the potential legalisation/decriminalisation of the raw product (cannabis plant). The term medicinal cannabis refers to pharmaceutical products containing cannabis that have been registered or listed on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG), or exempted by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), an agency of the Australian Government.

Medical cannabis pharmaceuticals are prescription medicines, so access for each patient starts with assessment by a medical practitioner.

Some facts

Pharmaceutical grade medicinal cannabis products include a range of preparations packaged and labelled for human therapeutic use including flowers, liquids, lozenges, oils, sprays, tablets, tinctures and other extracts. Pharmaceutical grade products are produced by licensed businesses, and are of high quality and consistency.

Most medical cannabis pharmaceuticals are produced overseas and have not been assessed for inclusion on the ARTG. As at January 2022, the exceptions are Sativex® for use in multiple sclerosis and Epidyolex® for use in Dravet Syndrome a rare form of epilepsy.

Prescribing of a medicinal cannabis product requires the prescriber to obtain an exemption from the TGA via one of three pathways: Special Access Scheme (SAS), Authorised Prescriber or Clinical Trial.

In the Northern Territory (NT), Schedule 8 (S8) medicinal cannabis medicines are regulated in the same way as other S8 medicines such as morphine and oxycodone. The prescriber does not need to obtain an NT authorisation prior to prescribing medicinal cannabis for a particular patient, although 'notification' to the Chief Health Officer is required if treatment is successful and the patient will be receiving the medicine for more than two months. From January 2022, S8 prescriptions written by a prescriber located in another Australian state or territory can be dispensed in the NT. This includes medicinal cannabis pharmaceuticals.

Cannabidiol (CBD) products are Schedule 4 (S4) (prescription only), which is the same as medicines used for conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, epilepsy etc. There is no requirement in the NT to notify when these products are prescribed.

NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

What you should do

You need to discuss your medical conditions and treatment history with your general practitioner (GP) so they can consider potential benefits from medicinal cannabis. The GP may then refer you to an appropriate specialist for specific assessment and support.

If the decision is made to prescribe a medicinal cannabis product, the medical practitioner may need TGA approval – unless the product is on the ARTG i.e. Sativex® or Epidyolex®.

When the TGA approval arrives, the medical practitioner can issue a prescription that complies with NT medicines and poisons law. As medicinal cannabis pharmaceuticals are not routinely stocked by pharmacies (or medicines wholesalers), the prescriber is advised to contact the pharmacy to discuss stock availability and ordering. It is likely that the dispensing pharmacy will need to order the product and this may take some time if it needs to be imported from overseas. In addition, medicinal cannabis is not subsidised under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) (apart from Epidyolex®), so patients must pay the full price of each prescription. Please discuss price with the pharmacy before the medicine is ordered. The pharmacy may also request that you pay a deposit.

Patients may bring medicines prescribed and dispensed interstate into the NT for personal use in the manner intended by the prescriber. The medicines must remain in the original packaging and the dispensing label (listing product name, dosage, patients name, prescriber name, pharmacy or dispensing point contact details) must remain on the medicine. Please keep a copy of the TGA approval document to provide to other health practitioners and the Police if required.

Further information

https://www.tga.gov.au/medicinal-cannabis

https://www.tga.gov.au/australian-register-therapeutic-goods

https://www.odc.gov.au/

Legislation

Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 2012 - NT Department of Health. https://legislation.nt.gov.au

Misuse of Drugs Act 1990 - NT Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. https://legislation.nt.gov.au

Narcotic Drugs Act 1967 - Australian Government, Office of Drug Control. https://www.legislation.gov.au

Therapeutic Goods Act 1989 regulates medicines and other therapeutic products for human use and is the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government, Therapeutic Goods Administration. https://www.legislation.gov.au

Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs 1961 - https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/single-convention.html

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