

Medical marijuana importation approved by Federal Government to boost supplies

By political reporter [Stephanie Anderson](#)
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Medical marijuana will soon be easier to access amid moves by the Federal Government to loosen importation laws.

Imported medicinal marijuana — used to treat patients with chronic or painful illnesses including cancer, severe epilepsy and motor neurone disease — could be available under the Government's new scheme in eight weeks, according to Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt.

The medication is currently sourced from overseas on a case-by-case basis, but the new scheme would see an interim fast track on importation while local cultivation — which has been legal since October 2016 — increases to meet demand.

Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt said it was the "first time in history" the Government would facilitate an import process for the interim supply.

Mr Hunt said the change would ensure there were sufficient supplies for "all of the medical demand", to be distributed to patients who have requested it from their doctor.

"That won't happen overnight, but what we've done here is issue a call for people to be able to establish an interim supply for and within Australia through importation," he said.

"Last year, the law was put in place which made medicinal cannabis available. Now however I want to ... deal immediately with the question of supply."

The Government last year legalised medicinal cannabis use and states regulate its cultivation, with Victoria having already harvested its first cannabis crop for medicinal use by people with epilepsy.

Mr Hunt praised Victoria for its work in cultivating the crop, citing the need for "safe, high quality, appropriately obtained medicine", dismissing the potential for decriminalisation of wider cannabis use in the future.

He said there was also a private cultivation program being developed for long-term supply with the first licence issued last week.

"Ultimately this is about the Government doing the right thing under the strictest conditions. Safety and quality are paramount," he said.

Cannabis campaigner still has concerns about accessibility



PHOTO: Lucy Haslam's son, Dan (left), used cannabis to deal with symptoms of bowel cancer treatment. (Supplied: Paul Mathews)

A prominent medicinal cannabis campaigner welcomed the Government's move, but said problems remain with accessibility pathways.

Lucy Haslam's son Dan was using medicinal cannabis to deal with the symptoms of bowel cancer treatment before he died in New South Wales almost two years ago.

She said Wednesday's change was "long overdue" but the proof will be in how quickly patients are able to get medicinal cannabis in their hands as many still find the application process for access difficult.

"Even the process of finding an authorised prescriber [is hard]," she said.

"I'll be looking to see how the Government makes it easier for patients, how they marry up the disconnect between the patients looking for medicine and being able to find somebody to prescribe it for them."

"They're not allowed to advertise the fact that they can prescribe the drug, so that's very difficult when you're a patient looking for somebody to prescribe it," she added.

"That's what I mean in terms of hurdles for patients, it's those sort of things which I think the Government could sort out quite quickly."

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) has urged caution about the sale of medicinal cannabis.

AMA vice-president Tony Bartone said many doctors were still waiting to see the results of clinical trials.

"The majority are still waiting for the proof, the reliable trials, the clinical evidence to come in," Dr Bartone said.

Key points:

- Greg Hunt announces easier importation of medicinal cannabis from suppliers overseas
- Domestic cultivation became legal in 2016 but patients are having difficulty accessing adequate supply
- Imports under the new scheme could become available in 8 weeks, Minister Hunt says