

WA companies welcome decision to prescribe medicinal cannabis

By [Rebecca Turner](#)

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Medicinal cannabis companies have welcomed the WA Government's decision to allow doctors to prescribe medicinal cannabis, calling it the final hurdle which had to be overcome to set up a homegrown industry.

From Tuesday, medicinal cannabis growers and manufacturers can apply for a licence and specialist doctors can prescribe drugs containing cannabinoids.

But it is unlikely that doctors will be filling out prescription pads soon, considering they first need to receive approval from both the Therapeutic Drugs Administration and a WA government advisory committee which is yet to be established.

The committee will be appointed by Health Minister John Day and will not have any restrictions on the conditions for when medicinal cannabis can be prescribed, unlike in Victoria where it is only legal for children with epilepsy.

But things are moving faster for the fledgling WA medicinal cannabis industry, with the WA Government's green light kicking the business plans into action.

The executive chairman of Perth-based MGC Pharmaceuticals, Brett Mitchell, called today's announcement "a significant event".

MGC was the first medicinal cannabis company to list on the Australian Stock Exchange and is already growing medicinal cannabis in Slovenia but now planned to start operations in Western Australia.

"It's significant for us in a material way because it endorses the legitimacy of our sector," he said.



PHOTO: [Mal Washer said his company AusCann is hoping to run clinical trials soon.](#) (WA News: Robbie Koenig Luck)

AusCann to produce cannabis in WA

The announcement meant that another Perth company, AusCann, had abandoned plans to grow medicinal cannabis on Christmas Island and will establish its horticultural and manufacturing production on mainland Western Australia.

"It's a hurdle we have had to overcome and [the Government] has done a good job," its chairman, Mal Washer, said.

Dr Washer, a former Federal Liberal MP and former general practitioner, said his company was hoping to run clinical trials at Princess Margaret Hospital with children with epilepsy and also at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital for patients with chronic pain.

But he was conscious that companies producing medicinal cannabis, while recreational cannabis was still illegal, would be watched closely by authorities.

"We want to do this in a pristine way and in an appropriate way so it's professional," he said.

"Because if we get someone in here who does the wrong thing, you can imagine what will happen, so I am very conscious you have only got one chance to do it properly."

But the WA branch of the Australian Medical Association (AMA) played down the announcement, saying he expected it to benefit very few patients and that there was little science proving that medicinal cannabis was better than other drugs.

"We think it could be useful for some severe sufferers of multiple sclerosis," its president Andrew Miller said.

"But other than that, despite many other trials that have been done, in countries where this has been done for some time, there has been no clear advantage over any of the other drugs on the market."