

Medical Cannabis Controlled Access Scheme

The Tasmanian Government has developed a medical cannabis controlled access scheme (CAS).

The scheme allows relevant medical specialists to be authorised to prescribe medical cannabis (unregistered cannabinoid products) in limited circumstances where conventional treatment has been unsuccessful.

How will unregistered cannabinoid products be prescribed?

You should first discuss the potential role of these products with your GP.

If your GP considers that conventional treatment has failed and an unregistered cannabinoid product may help, they will refer you to a relevant medical specialist.

If the specialist also considers an unregistered cannabinoid product is clinically appropriate and indicated for your medical condition, they may apply for a legal authorisation from the Department of Health to prescribe the product for you.

The scheme imposes conditions to ensure patient safety, which includes the review of applications by a panel of clinicians.

You will need to sign a consent form acknowledging and accepting the risks of using an unregistered product.

Where will unregistered cannabinoid products be available?

Patients with a prescription provided under the scheme will have them dispensed from a

Tasmanian Health Service hospital pharmacy.

What medical conditions may benefit from treatment with unregistered cannabinoid products?

The Tasmanian CAS does not identify any particular conditions which may or may not benefit from medical cannabis products.

This is because there is currently a lack of definitive, high quality evidence on the safety and effectiveness of unregistered cannabinoid products for any medical condition, so relevant medical specialists must apply for an authorisation for each patient they wish to trial with a product.

Why can't my family doctor prescribe unregistered cannabinoid products?

GPs will not be authorised to prescribe these products under the CAS because of the risks associated with using unregistered products.

However, the Tasmanian Government acknowledges that if conventional treatments have failed, a relevant medical specialist may believe the trial of an unregistered cannabinoid product is appropriate.

While the evidence for safety and effectiveness of these products is being established, it is essential they are only prescribed by relevant medical specialists who are experts in their field.

Of course, your family doctor will be closely involved with your ongoing care, including communicating with the specialist.

How much would unregistered cannabinoid products cost?

Unregistered cannabinoid products in Australia are currently expensive and are not covered by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

Patients prescribed an unregistered cannabinoid product under the CAS will be able to have it dispensed by a Tasmanian Health Service hospital pharmacy.

This means the most they will pay is the applicable PBS patient co-payment each time the product is dispensed as a result of funding provided by the Tasmanian Government.

What if the specialist does not prescribe medical cannabis to me?

You should discuss the specialist's assessment with your GP at first instance as, for example, the specialist may not have prescribed medical cannabis because they considered that other treatment options could be more effective and/or had a better evidence base.

Is cannabis still illegal?

Yes. The new scheme does not affect the status of cannabis as an illegal drug that causes significant harm in the community.

All Tasmanian offences for cannabis cultivation, possession and use still apply.

Exceptions to this are unregistered cannabinoid products prescribed and accessed under this scheme, and cannabis grown and cannabinoid products made under *Narcotic Drug Act 1967* licenses issued by the Australian Government's Office of Drug Control.

Can I grow cannabis?

No. Individuals cannot legally grow their own cannabis, even if they have a prescription.

In late 2016 the Australian Government introduced a national licensing scheme to oversee the controlled cultivation of cannabis, and the production and manufacture of cannabinoid products for medical and scientific purposes.

Organisations or individuals interested in cultivating cannabis and producing or making cannabinoid products should contact the Australian Government's Office of Drug Control at www.odc.gov.au.