

# **Title: Cannabis Use in Opioid Agonist Treatment Population**

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## **Objectives:**

- 1) Assessment and comparison of sociodemographic and clinic indicators in OAT population who are cannabis users with non-cannabis users
- 2) Assessing the amount, duration, reasons, interest in addressing and methods of addressing cannabis use in OAT population
- 3) Designing and implementing an integrated care service for addressing cannabis use in OAT population in NSW

## **Synopsis:**

This project aims for initially assessing sociodemographic and clinical indicators of cannabis use disorder population who are on Opioid Agonist Treatment (OAT) at ten drug and alcohol clinics at NSW for ten years and comparing it to non-cannabis users on OAT. These sociodemographic factors include: age, sex, country of birth, primary spoken language, principal source of income, living arrangement and post code of residences at commencement of services. The clinical indicators include: principle drug of concern, methods of use of principal drug of concern, medical and psychological comorbidities.

It also will investigate the amount, duration, reasons and gauge the interest of cannabis users on OAT in addressing their cannabis use and methods of addressing their cannabis use disorder through designing a survey or qualitative study.

The third part of project will be designing and implementing an integrated care service for addressing cannabis use disorder in OAT population. This service may include traditional pathway of withdrawal management associate with harm minimisation strategies or considering novel treatments such as using combination of CBD+THC or CBD for withdrawal management in accompany of psychosocial support and harm minimisation strategies.

## **Background:**

There has been general consensus that cannabis use is harmless.(1) However, studies have been showing cannabis use is harmful for brain development, causing cognition impairment, lower life satisfaction, and is associated with respiratory disease, psychotic episodes and polysubstance use.(2-4) In Australia, cannabis is used more frequently than other illicit drugs

and there has been an increasing tolerance for regular adult cannabis use among the Australian general population, from 9.8% in 2013 to 14.5% in 2016.(5) Also in 2016, there has been 34.8% Australians who had used cannabis once in their life time.(5) Some of the populations are at risk of more harm with cannabis use. One of these population include patients who are on OAT for addressing their opioid use disorder.(6) Opioid use is responsible for 1.0% of the total burden of disease and injuries in Australia in 2015.(7) In 2018, there were more than 50,000 patients on OAT around Australia.(7) OAT is the maintenance therapy usually provided for relieving the opioid withdrawal symptoms and assisting patient to return to their previous functioning level.(6) The effects of cannabis use on treatment outcome is not quite clear, with some studies showing no effect on the OAT outcome (8, 9) and other showing decreased treatment retention.(6) Also with recent modification of legislation in medical use of cannabis in USA and Canada, it has been reported cannabis use will decrease mortality rate related to opioid overdose.(6) To our knowledge, there has been no Australian study performed on analysing and comparing cannabis use on population receiving OAT for their opioid use disorder. The questions still are remaining whether cannabis use in OAT population need to be addressed and whether a multidisciplinary service will be the best modality to address the issue in OAT population.

### **Significance:**

In view of recent movements around the world including Australia, to legalise access to cannabis outside the medical system(10-12), and the fact that it may benefit the general population as a whole, the effect of cannabis on marginalised sub population such as patients on OAT, are not clear yet.(6) to our knowledge there is no data on cannabis use of OAT population in Australia. This project will assist us to understand more about cannabis use in OAT population, methods to address it and will establish a service to address this.

### **Methodology:**

The first part of project is a cross sectional study and use descriptive statistical method for comparison between non cannabis users and cannabis user on OAT. The second part of project is a survey from a consented group of cannabis users on OAT and is analysed by qualitative method. The third part of the project is designing a multidisciplinary service at South Easter Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) for addressing cannabis use by medical and psychosocial management based on the analysis of qualitative study for both withdrawal period and long term managemnet if required.

### **Resources:**

The population of study are OAT population who are regularly dosed for their treatment at Drug and Alcohol Clinical Research and Improvement Network (DACRIN) clinics around NSW and their sociodemographic and clinical indictors are routine collected and recorded at electronic Medical Records at DACRIN clinics. The routine data at start of the project will be collected, decoded and recorded on the Excel data sheet. This data will be analysed by descriptive data analysis. A working group will be developed for designing a consent and standard survey questionnaire. Based on the data collected through this survey, a multi-disciplinary service for addressing cannabis use will be established.

## Workplan:

- 1) 2020- performing a cross sectional study on current data available on DACRIN and comparison between sociodemographic between non cannabis users and cannabis users in OAT population
- 2) 2021- designing and implementing a survey and qualitative study with possible focus groups for understanding the reasons, duration and intention to treating cannabis use disorder in OAT population in DACRIN clinic
- 3) 2022 onward- designing, implementing and evaluating a multi-disciplinary service based on expressed need of cannabis users on OAT for addressing cannabis use, withdrawal management and long-term treatment

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