

Participant Information Statement

Cannabis Use and Cultivation in the Australian Capital Territory following Legislative Changes (CAN-ACT) Study

Short title:	CAN-ACT study
HREC Approval Number:	2021/979
Research Institute:	Lambert Initiative for Cannabinoid Therapeutics, University of Sydney
Principal Investigator:	Professor Iain McGregor (Principal Investigator) Phone: +61 2 9114 4238 Email: iain.mcgregor@sydney.edu.au

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in the 'CAN-ACT' study because you are an adult living in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) with current or prior experience using or growing cannabis.

The CAN-ACT study involves two components: (1) a short online survey and (2) the option to have your personal cannabis sample analyzed.

This Participant Information Sheet tells you about the study survey. It also describes information about you that will be obtained, how that information will be used and with whom it will be shared. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research.

Please read this information carefully. Ask questions about anything that you do not understand or want to know more about. The research team's contact details are on page 5 of this document.

Participation in this research is voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to. If you decide to participate, at the beginning of the survey, you will be presented with a Consent Form to read and confirm your consent by clicking 'Submit'. This will confirm that you understand what you have read and consent to take part in this research study.

This Participant Information Sheet is for you to keep.

If you choose to partake in cannabis sample analysis, you will be provided with another Participant Information Sheet that includes important information.

You will also find a Frequently Asked Questions 'FAQ' document on the CAN-ACT website, which contains answers to typical questions relating to the study.

What is the background of this study?

Cannabis is the most commonly used and cultivated illicit drug worldwide. In recent years, cannabis use has increased significantly among Australians for both medicinal and non-medicinal purposes. This coincides with renewed global interest in the therapeutic properties of cannabis, and the Australian Federal Government legalising medicinal cannabis through doctor prescription schemes in 2016. Community support for medicinal cannabis continues to grow, which may be influenced by global

trends towards legalisation and media stories of patients whose lives have been transformed by cannabis-based medicines.

While many Australians are accessing legal medicinal cannabis through doctor prescription, many are accessing medicinal cannabis through alternative (non-prescribed) sources, such as friends, family or online vendors. The prevalence of non-prescribed medicinal cannabis use is driven by the high cost of prescribed products and shortage of doctors willing to prescribe.

Different Australian states have different legislative approaches to cannabis. In January 2020, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) introduced new laws allowing ACT residents to grow and possess small quantities of cannabis. These laws were introduced to support residents, reduce individual harms associated with having a criminal record, and reduce burden to the judicial system. Following these changes Simple Cannabis Offence Notices have decreased by nearly 90% in the ACT.

Despite this, the ACT cannabis laws are rather vague. For example, it is not clear whether or how ACT residents can legally source cannabis seeds or plants. The ACT cannabis laws are also inconsistent with Commonwealth law, which prohibits the possession and growth of cannabis. The ACT cannabis laws are unique within Australia and offer a rare opportunity to examine the outcomes of cannabis legalisation in a local community setting.

The cannabis plant is made up of many components, including the two best known cannabinoids delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and low cannabidiol (CBD). THC is primarily responsible for the psychoactive (“stoned”) effects of cannabis, whereas CBD is known for its anti-anxiety properties. Cannabis includes more than 800 different cultivars (strains) which vary greatly in cannabinoid content. Characterization of “homegrown” ACT cannabis has never been conducted and will provide insight as to the type of cannabis being grown in the ACT.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the project is to investigate changes in the use of cannabis, both medical and non-medical, arising from ACT legislative changes. The study will provide critical insight into ACT residents’ knowledge of the current law and opinions around future reforms. The survey will seek to understand how ACT residents have responded to the policy change, that is, how they are accessing using and growing cannabis.

It is also of interest to determine the medical conditions that are being treated with legal homegrown cannabis and whether the cannabis being grown has a typical “intoxicating” profile involving high THC and low cannabidiol CBD. We will anonymously collect and analyse samples of cannabis grown and/or possessed by ACT residents to quantify cannabinoid content and check for the possible presence of contaminants such as heavy metals and pesticides. Cannabis sample analysis is an optional element of the study.

This project will indicate the merits and shortcomings of the new cannabis laws in the ACT. Accordingly, this study may have implications for future policy change in Australia. The study will add to the growing body of literature examining the medicinal application of cannabinoid therapies in the community more broadly.

Who is running the study?

The study is being conducted by the Lambert Initiative for Cannabinoid Therapeutics, at the University of Sydney, a philanthropically funded research body that conducts research into medicinal cannabis.

Who can take part in the study?

You can take part in this research study if you are at least **18 years of age**, live in the **ACT**, and either:

- *Currently or previously* have used cannabis for **any** reason (e.g., medicinal or recreational); or
- *Currently or previously* have **grown** cannabis at your property.

If you have never used cannabis for any reason AND have never grown cannabis, unfortunately, you are not eligible to participate in this study.

What is involved in the study?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will first be invited to participate in a short **online survey**. After you complete the survey, you can register to have your home-grown or personally held **cannabis samples analysed** for cannabinoid and contaminant content. *This is not a mandatory requirement for taking part in the study.* If you decide to partake in sample analysis, an independent study Courier will collect your cannabis sample to be analysed at the University of Sydney.

The online survey takes approximately 10-minutes to complete and will ask about you; your experiences with growing cannabis; your prior and present cannabis use for any reason; medical conditions and symptoms for which medical cannabis is being used; adverse effects; trepidations around use (e.g., legal, driving); changes in access and use since legalisation; and, preferences around future access pathways and legislative reform.

The survey is strictly **confidential** and **anonymous**. You will not be asked any identifying information.

When you begin the survey, you will be provided with an anonymised CAN-ACT User ID and Password. These details will enable you to leave and return to the online survey as you please. They will also be used later to register for cannabis sample analysis and to view the results.

Please take note of your CAN-ACT User ID and Password. It's a good idea to write them down on a piece of paper and store it somewhere safe. As the online survey is completely anonymised, there will be no way for the research team to remind you of your CAN-ACT User ID or reset your password.

To ensure your anonymity, please don't tell anyone your CAN-ACT User ID or Password. Please also destroy any record of your CAN-ACT User ID and Password once the study is over. This will ensure there is no way to link you with the responses you submit to the online survey.

How much time will my involvement in the study take?

The survey should take around 10 minutes to complete. If you choose to have your cannabis sample analysed, additional time will be required to organise sample pickup with the independent study courier.

Will my participation be anonymous?

The survey will not ask for any information that could identify you (you will not be asked your name, address, or contact details) and your IP addresses will not be collected. This means there is no way to link you to the survey information that you submit.

Are there any risks associated with participating in the project?

No identifying information or IP addresses will be collected that could link you to the survey information that you submit. This protects your anonymity and mitigates any legal risk associated with completing the study survey.

What are the potential benefits of the research project to me?

You will not be directly benefited for participating in the online survey. More broadly, the study aims to provide insights into the outcomes of recent ACT cannabis legalisation, within an Australian context, which may be of personal interest. This study could also have implications for future policy change in Australia.

Will I be paid to take part in this study?

No, you will not be paid to take part in this study.

Will I incur any costs for taking part in the study?

No. The study sponsor will cover all costs associated with sample transport and analysis.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary, you can withdraw at any time by logging into the study website and selecting 'Withdraw'. Please keep note of your CAN-ACT User ID and Password (as the study is anonymous, the research team is unable to locate or reset your details).

What will happen with my information?

Your data will only be used for the purpose of research as described in this Participant Information Sheet. Your survey data is completely anonymous, and we will be unable to identify your specific responses. Only the principal investigator and the research team will have access to your data.

The overall results of this study will be published in an aggregated or group format in scientific journals accessible to the public. Free access to these publications will be ensured so that any member of the community, including survey participants, can freely access these results. Results may also be presented at academic conferences. The anonymised data may also be used for future research purposes limited to the work of the Lambert Initiative for Cannabinoid Therapeutics at the University of Sydney.

How will I find out the results of the study?

You will be able to access the overall results of the study on the Lambert Initiative Website: <https://www.sydney.edu.au/lambert/news/publications.html>. The study results should be published approximately 6 months after the study closes.

Who has reviewed the research project?

All research in Australia involving humans is reviewed by an independent group called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) incorporating all updates. This Statement has been developed to protect the interests of people who agree to participate in human research studies.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project or would like to participate?

Please do not disclose any identifying information (e.g., your name, address or contact details) when contacting the research team or Ethics Committee. To ensure your anonymity, please phone using a private number (i.e., switch off caller ID). Please also be aware that the use of email to contact the research team or Ethics Committee may identify your name.

General enquiries

If you are interested in participating or have any questions or would like additional information, please contact:

Name	Isobel Lavender
Position	Research Assistant
Telephone	+61 481 475 730
Email	isobel.lavender@sydney.edu.au

To raise a concern or a complaint

If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the survey or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, please consult the Principal Investigator.

Name	Professor Iain McGregor
Position	Principal Investigator
Telephone	02 9351 0883
Email	iain.mcgregor@sydney.edu.au

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

Should you wish to discuss the study or view a copy of the Complaint procedure with someone not directly involved, particularly in relation to matters concerning policies, information, or complaints about the conduct of the study or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Human Ethics Manager (+61 2 8627 8176). Please quote the HREC Approval number (2021/979).

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

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