

## Participant Information Statement

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

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

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Dear Participant,

This Participant Information Sheet tells you about the second element of the CAN-ACT Study, cannabis sample analysis.

You are invited to take part in cannabis sample analysis because you have indicated current use or cultivation of cannabis.

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 7 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.

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 partly 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 through an anonymous online survey. 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 delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (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. This element of the study is optional.

This project will indicate the merits and shortcomings of the new cannabis laws in the ACT. The 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 cannabis sample analysis?

You can take part in cannabis sample analysis if you have completed the CAN-ACT survey and are:

- At least **18 years old**;
- You currently live in the ACT; and
- You currently use or grow cannabis for any reason (i.e., medical or recreational).

### What is involved in cannabis sample analysis?

After you complete the survey, you can register to have your home-grown or personally held **cannabis sample analysed** for cannabinoid and contaminant content. *This is not a mandatory requirement for taking part in the study.*

If you decide to partake in cannabis sample analysis, you will need to prepare your cannabis sample according to the instructions provided on the *Free analysis of your cannabis* webpage of the CAN-ACT Website. This process involves a number of simple steps. Please read the instructions carefully, it is designed to ensure that we safely receive and process your sample and can report the results back to you, but that you and your address remain anonymous. You can then contact the study Courier to arrange sample pickup, free of charge.

Analysis of cannabis samples will take place at the University of Sydney Psychopharmacology Laboratories. Additional profiling of pesticides, heavy metals and moulds will be undertaken by ChemCentre in Perth. When ready, your individual sample analysis results will be uploaded to the CAN-ACT Website. You will need your CAN-ACT User ID and Password to view your results on the CAN-ACT Website.

**Please take note of your CAN-ACT User ID and Password.** 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 do I organise sample pickup?

You can phone the study Courier to schedule free sample pickup from an ACT Pickup Address of your choosing. The study Courier contact details and pickup hours are provided on the *Free analysis of your cannabis* section of the CAN-ACT Website.

### What information should I tell the study Courier?

You will need to provide the study courier with a Pickup Address, your Pickup Code, and the CAN-ACT Study number. This information is provided on the *Free analysis of your cannabis* section of the CAN-ACT Website.

Please **do not** tell the study courier your **CAN-ACT User ID number, or your name, or your phone number**. This is to protect your anonymity and ensure there is no way to associate your survey responses with your sample pickup address.

### How much time will my involvement take?

If you choose to have your cannabis sample analysed, it should take 5-10 minutes to prepare your sample for courier pickup. Additional time will be required to organise sample pickup with the independent study courier.

### What will cannabis sample analysis tell me?

The cannabis plant contains over 100 different compounds called *cannabinoids*. The most well-known cannabinoid is tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) – and is mostly responsible for the intoxicating effects of cannabis (i.e., feeling “high”). Other cannabinoids in the plant are generally not intoxicating but are of interest for their possible therapeutic effects. For example, cannabidiol (CBD) appears to have anti-anxiety and pain-relieving qualities. *Terpenoids* are aromatic compounds found in many plants, also thought to hold medicinal properties. Examples include pinene, limonene, myrcene, and beta-caryophyllene.

All cannabis samples will be analysed for cannabinoid and terpenoid content.

Your cannabis can also be analysed for *contaminant* content, but this will require slightly more cannabis. Common contaminants found in cannabis include heavy metals (metals that can be toxic to human health), mycotoxins (poisons produced by certain moulds [fungi], also harmful to human health), and pesticides (chemicals that kill insects and other pests) which can also be harmful to human health.

### How much cannabis do I need to provide?

The amount of cannabis you provide will influence the kind of analysis that can be performed.

If you only provide a **0.5 gram sample**, we will be able to tell you the level of cannabinoids (e.g., THC and CBD) and terpenoids in your cannabis. 0.5 grams of cannabis is around the size of a 1-dollar coin.

If you provide a **3 gram sample**, we will also tell you the levels of heavy metals and mycotoxins present in your cannabis. 3 grams of cannabis is around the size of an apricot.

If you provide a **6 gram sample**, we will also tell you the level of pesticides present in your cannabis. 6 grams of cannabis is around the size of an orange.

### How will I view my cannabis sample analysis results?

You can check for your results by logging on to the CAN-ACT website ([www.can-act.com.au](http://www.can-act.com.au)) using your CAN-ACT User ID and CAN-ACT Password. Your individual THC/CBD (cannabinoid) results should be available 6-10-weeks after sample pickup. Pesticides, heavy metals, and mycotoxins may take a little longer.

### **What should I do if I find out my cannabis contains harmful contaminants?**

If you feel concerned about the presence of contaminants in your cannabis, you can discuss the results with the New South Wales Poisons Information Centre (Telephone: 13 11 26; <https://www.poisonsinfo.nsw.gov.au/>).

### **Who should I contact if I feel distressed by cannabis sample results?**

If you decide to partake in cannabis analysis, it may be distressing to learn that your cannabis contains harmful contaminants. If this is the case, please contact one of the following free 24-hour support services:

- Lifeline (Telephone: 13 11 13; website: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>)
- Beyond Blue (Telephone 1300 22 4636; <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>)

### **Are there any risks associated with participating in cannabis sample analysis?**

If you decide to have your cannabis sample analysed, you will need to provide the independent courier with a pick-up address. The courier will confidentially store the pick-up address indefinitely and it will not be shared with the research team. Providing a cannabis sample therefore carries a small amount of risk, considering that World Courier retains addresses for all deliveries. In the unlikely event that the pick-up address is subpoenaed, the courier will need to provide the address. For this reason, you may choose not to use your residential address if you believe you are engaging in illegal activity. You will, however, need to be present when the courier arrives to collect the sample.

The ACT cannabis laws conflict with Commonwealth law, which prohibits the possession and cultivation of cannabis. It is stated on the ACT cannabis website that the ACT holds the right to legislate cannabis offences, but it is possible for the Commonwealth to test the ACT's laws in the courts. It may be theoretically possible for cannabis users to be prosecuted under Commonwealth law, but no such prosecutions have been attempted since the ACT laws came into effect. As such, the study has been designed to ensure participant anonymity.

### **What are the potential benefits of cannabis sample analysis?**

Participants will be offered the opportunity to have their cannabis samples tested to quantify cannabinoid content (e.g., THC, CBD) and check for the presence of contaminants (e.g., pesticides, heavy metals). You will be able to access their individualised results via a secure online database.

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 have significant 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 cannabis sample analysis?**

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 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. Data relating to cannabis sample analysis will be retained by the Lambert Initiative (de-identified) for the purpose of scientific publication. 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 overall 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:

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| Name      | Isobel Lavender    |
| Position  | Research Assistant |
| Telephone | +61 481 475 730    |

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| Email | <a href="mailto:isobel.lavender@sydney.edu.au">isobel.lavender@sydney.edu.au</a> |
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### **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.

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| Name      | Professor Iain McGregor  |
| Position  | Principal Investigator   |
| Telephone | 02 9351 0883   |
| Email     | <a href="mailto:iain.mcgregor@sydney.edu.au">iain.mcgregor@sydney.edu.au</a> |

### **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.

***This Participant Information Sheet is for you to keep.***