

PRESS RELEASE

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Cannabis law reform in Victoria a necessary step to improving community wellbeing

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) supports law reform which reduces law and order interventions among people who use drugs. To that end, VAADA supports the *Regulation of Cannabis (Personal Use) Bill 2023* currently before the Victorian Parliament.

The criminalisation of cannabis has done little to curb use with 97% of Victorians who use drugs citing that hydroponic cannabis is either easy or very easy to obtain¹.

Furthermore, 92% of cannabis related arrests nationally target possession and use, with only 8% relating to trafficking².

The burden is not only carried by the individuals unnecessarily drawn into the justice system, but also creates a significant burden on scarce public resources, with, \$2.4B of the \$4.5B costs associated with cannabis nationally, being related to law and order expenditure (predominantly policing and prisons)³.

Chris Christoforou, CEO of VAADA, says, 'it is apparent from the data that the policing of cannabis is unnecessarily focussed on people consuming rather than trafficking cannabis with those efforts having little to no effect in curbing use.'

Cannabis remains the third most common principle drug of concern among those presenting to Victorian alcohol and other drug (AOD)treatment agencies, with a greater portion of younger people presenting with cannabis related concerns.

It is evident that the majority of the families surveyed who have loved ones experiencing AOD dependence and related harms support cannabis drug law reform, with 79% of families surveyed in 2021 supporting cannabis legalisation.⁴

Mr Christoforou continues, 'the default approach of prioritising a criminal response to cannabis is an expensive policy failure that does nothing to curb use, while contributing to greater harm, by drawing people unnecessarily into the justice system. The criminalisation of cannabis creates a financial burden on the state by directing scarce resources to approaches that don't work. We need to listen to the families of those impacted by cannabis use and progress with sensible reforms. To that end, VAADA supports this Bill'.

For more information or to arrange an interview please contact David Taylor on 0413 914 206.

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¹ Eddy et al 2022. Victorian Drug Trends 2021. EDRS. <https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/resource/victorian-drug-trends-2021-key-findings-ecstasy-and-related-drugs-reporting-system-edrs>

² NDAK 2023. How many cannabis arrests are there each year in Australia? <https://nadk.flinders.edu.au/kb/cannabis/cannabis-crime/how-many-cannabis-related-arrests-are-there-each-year-in-australia>

³ NDRI. 2020. Cannabis Use Costs Australia \$4.5 billion. 5 August. <https://ndri.curtin.edu.au/news-events/ndri-news/media-release-cannabis-use-costs-australia-4-5-bil>

⁴ Family Drug Support. 2021. *Time for Change*. [International Family Drug Support Day - Time for Change - Report 2022 \(fds.org.au\)](https://www.familydrugsupport.org.au/)

Media stories on alcohol and other drugs may be traumatic for some people. Support is available and we ask that media agencies consider publishing the details below:

If this story has raised issues about your own or others drug and alcohol use, please contact the national hotline for confidential counselling and referral on 1800 250 015

VAADA is the peak body that represents over 80 Alcohol and other Drug services across Victoria. On a daily basis these services are dealing with the effects of harmful alcohol and other drug consumption.