



Office of the Prime Minister's
Chief Science Advisor

Kaitohutohu Mātanga Pūtaiao Matua ki te Pirimia

CANNABIS EXPERT PANEL – Minutes from Meeting 1 Monday 9 September 2019

Karakia & Meeting opened: 10.00am

Present: Prof Juliet Gerrard (co-Chair), Professor Tracey McIntosh (co-Chair), Associate Professor Joseph Boden, Dr Hinemoa Elder, Professor Benedikt Fischer, Professor Michelle Glass, Dr David Newcombe, Associate Professor Khylee Quince, Professor Doug Sellman, Associate Professor Tamasailau Suaalii, Associate Professor Chris Wilkins, Dr Michelle Sullivan (panel support)

Project overview

Output document – a short, simple summary that needs to be honest and accurate. This will be delivered to the PM's office and they will decide the process from there. There are no recommendations, and even-handed treatment of the evidence is paramount. A longer form document will also be useful by way of supporting information, and it makes sense to write this first and distill the lay summary from the details.

Official Information Act – transparency will underpin everything that we do.

Public engagement. Panellists can continue to engage on a business-as-usual basis, as individuals. Anything related to the panel will be kept confidential until the final report is released.

Values Statement (to be uploaded to PMCSA website)

The work of the panel will be characterised by rigour, respect, openness, collaboration, inclusivity and integrity. We recognise the significance of culture, including te Tiriti o Waitangi. We strive to acknowledge our biases and limitations, synthesise the evidence and expose the gaps.

Panellist introductions

Each panellist gave an overview of their background and area of expertise and declared any interests.

Action: Panel biographies to be uploaded to the PMCSA website. All panellists to complete the Interest Register.

Discussion of Report Themes.

The report needs to communicate clearly what cannabis is, and what is worrying about cannabis use. Panellists agreed that cannabis causes harm no matter what legal framework is in place. The work needs to focus on whether legalisation changes this harm. Comparing cannabis harm to alcohol provides some perspective, in that it can be consumed occasionally by a majority of people with minimal health consequences. The changes in policing and enforcing New Zealand's current cannabis laws have not been seen equally across the population, and this continues to impact Māori.

Panellists identified key themes that need to be considered in the report writing process, and individual panellists volunteered to contribute to various sections as outlined in the table below.



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Section theme	Notes	Panellists
Use & prevalence	The variety of use patterns. Polydrug use. Will there be more use if we legalise it?	Joe, Doug, Chris
Pharmacology	Cannabis as a drug, effects, THC, potency. Increasing potency and changing risk of harm as a result. Will it get more potent?	Michelle, David
History	Why cannabis is demonised compared to other substances.	Tracey, Joe
Health impacts	Biology, neurology, morbidity, mortality.	Hinemoa, David, Tamasaila, Michelle
Mental health	Psychosis, depression, anxiety.	Hinemoa, Joe
Current harm	Comparator with alcohol, methamphetamine, synthetics	David, Doug
Criminal justice	Cost to courts, arrest, jail, cost to community, rehabilitation (status quo vs future).	Tamasailau, Tracey, Khylee
Impact on Maori	Criminal justice, mental health, relative harms, complex issues	Tracey, Khylee, Hinemoa
Impact of reform	What has happened in other jurisdictions?	Chris, Benedikt
Interventions	Prevention, primary, secondary & treatment. What exists and how the different policy options influence these. Access issues, etc.	David, Benedikt
Supply side	State owned vs private sector options.	Chris

In addition to the cannabis-specific themes (in the above table), the panel discussed a number of other considerations:

- *What is evidence & the strength of the evidence base* – Being clear about what actual evidence looks like, the strengths and weaknesses of this evidence, and what the panel has confidence in. Inclusion of systematic reviews in the references, as well as recognising that indigenous issues are under-represented in the literature.
- *Case studies/Offshore experiences/Translation* – What other jurisdictions have done, and if/how this applies to New Zealand. Case studies can create accessible explainers for a general audience.
- *Frequently asked questions* – Ensuring that the report meets the information needs and answers the questions of whānau and communities.
- *Duty of care* – Ensuring that anyone reading the report who identifies the need to seek help is pointed in the right direction (e.g. helpline details).



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Matters Arising

Action item	Responsibility	Status
Peer reviewers. Gather nominations for potential reviewers and confirm whether reviewer names and emails are subject to OIA.	Michelle.	Nominations to be confirmed after we have a draft document. Agenda item for meeting #2.
Register of interests	Michelle to circulate	Remaining panellists to complete at meeting #2.
Media & public interest	Juliet	Blog post uploaded. https://www.pmcsa.ac.nz/our-projects/cannabis/
Regular updates on media coverage on cannabis & panellist activities	Susie	Underway.
Pasifika perspective	Tamasailau	Pending once a full draft of the report is available.

Karakia & Meeting closed: 3.10pm