



# WINDANA

Life. Changing.

## Windana's Submission to the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances  
Amendment (Regulation of Personal Adult Use of  
Cannabis) Bill 2023

December 2024

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## About Windana

### Providing connected services for more people in need.

Windana provides services across Victoria for adults and young people experiencing alcohol and other drug harms, family violence, mental health challenges and social disadvantage. Our Model of Care puts clients at the centre of what we do to create positive change in people's lives. We work with families, communities and other organisations to deliver trauma informed, equitable, culturally safe and integrated services based on evidence and practice wisdom.

### *Windana's interest in the Inquiry*

Every day, Windana works with clients and communities experiencing the negative effects of punitive drug policy. In our [2024-26 Strategic Plan](#), we commit to **changing more lives**, and our objectives also include influencing policies that impact clients ensuring their voices are heard, and working towards system change. **Windana is committed to sharing our expertise, insight and practice wisdom through this Submission to help the Committee act on the proposed Amendment, and alcohol and other drug policy more broadly.**

We are also eager to present to the Committee at the Inquiry's Public Hearing in early 2025, and assist in development and implementation of the following Recommendations.

## Windana's position on the Amendment

This Amendment will help Victoria to step away from the stigma that is at the root of many harms associated with substances<sup>1</sup>, while improving health, social and economic outcomes.

**Windana supports all aspects of the Amendment.** Our position draws on evidence and practice wisdom, reinforced by the reported impacts of the Australian Capital Territory's decriminalisation of the personal use of cannabis.

Windana's support of the Amendment is aligned with our broader position on decriminalisation. [Click to read Windana's Policy Position Statement on Harm Reduction.](#)

### *Looking to the ACT*

Penington Institute's *Cannabis in Australia 2024* Report summarised the impacts of decriminalisation in the ACT, finding that in the ACT cannabis-related offences have nearly been eliminated, ambulance callouts and hospitalisations have not changed significantly, and cannabis use remains relatively low<sup>2</sup>. A review by ACT Health released in August 2024 found that the amended Cannabis Act has led to reduced stigma and discrimination, increased willingness to seek support and improved relationships between members of the public who use cannabis and the police<sup>3</sup>.

Victoria is in the fortunate position of being able to assess the impacts of the ACT's limited cannabis decriminalisation, gaining valuable insights into the potential positive outcomes that this Amendment could have for our community in Victoria.

<sup>1</sup> Alcohol and Drug Foundation (2019) *Alcohol and other drugs: Stigma*, Alcohol and Drug Foundation, accessed 11 December 2024. [https://cdn.adf.org.au/media/documents/ADF\\_Stigma\\_background\\_paper.pdf](https://cdn.adf.org.au/media/documents/ADF_Stigma_background_paper.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Penington Institute (2024) *Cannabis in Australia 2024*, Penington Institute, accessed 11 December 2024. <https://www.penington.org.au/cannabis-in-australia-report-2024/>

<sup>3</sup> ACT Health (2024) *Review of the operation of the Drugs of Dependence (Personal Cannabis Use) amendment, Act 2019*, ACT Health, accessed 12 December 2024. [https://www.act.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/2570890/Review-of-the-operation-of-the-Drugs-of-Dependence-Personal-Cannabis-Use-Amendment-Act-2019.pdf](https://www.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/2570890/Review-of-the-operation-of-the-Drugs-of-Dependence-Personal-Cannabis-Use-Amendment-Act-2019.pdf)

## Recommendations

Building on the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, Windana is pleased to share related Recommendations that will reduce demand on acute services and improve health and social outcomes for Victorians.

*Recommendation 1: That the Victorian Government enhances referral pathways between emergency services and alcohol and other drug services to ensure at-risk Victorians receive appropriate support.*

Decriminalisation of cannabis gives Victoria a prime opportunity to reorient the role of emergency services personnel when in contact with people using drugs. To do this, we need to map needs-aligned referral pathways into existing services and develop the capacity of emergency services personnel to intervene and refer people to treatment and other supports. This will enable Victoria to experience the social, health and economic benefits<sup>4</sup> of early intervention, and enable opportunistic brief interventions which give the public access to information to reduce long-term harms associated with risky substance use<sup>5</sup>.

*Recommendation 2: That the Victorian Government strengthens school-based education around alcohol and other drugs to empower young people to make safer choices.*

Victoria's young people deserve to up-to-date, accessible, relevant and strengths-focused resources to build their health literacy. We have an opportunity to enhance the drug education mandated through Victoria's F-10 Health and Physical Education curriculum, and resources available through the Mental Health Fund Menu to address students' unique needs at different stages of their development. As these mechanisms evolve, they should ensure students have access to ongoing drug education at all levels of schooling (including in Years 11 and 12), with tailored programs in both government and independent schools, a focus on harm reduction, and an expanded Menu offering age-appropriate alcohol and drug education. The latter should include programs designed for early high school (and before experimentation with substances) when knowledge, attitudes and behaviours are being shaped<sup>6</sup>.

*Recommendation 3: That the Victorian Government decriminalises the use and possession of small quantities of all illicit drugs to improve health, social and economic outcomes.*

People impacted by substance use need care and support, not judgement or punishment. Decriminalising substance use will help ensure that people can get the care and support they need, rather than the short and long-term harm caused by ineffective and harmful<sup>7</sup> punitive approaches. Embedding evidence-based harm reduction approaches – like the decriminalisation measures covered by the Amendment – will see more people receive vital information, support and treatment. This will lead to safer behaviour, safer spaces, and ultimately, more lives saved.

**This submission was prepared and authorised by Di Nally, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Windana.**

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<sup>4</sup> Rethink Addiction (2022) *Understanding the cost of addiction in Australia*, Rethink Addiction, accessed 12 December 2024. <https://www.rethinkaddiction.org.au/understanding-the-cost-of-addiction-in-australia>

<sup>5</sup> Rodgers C (2018) 'Brief interventions for alcohol and other drug use', *Australian prescriber*, 41(4):117-121, <https://doi.org/10.18773/austprescr.2018.031>

<sup>6</sup> Alcohol and Drug Foundation (2019) *Drug Education in Schools*, Alcohol and Drug Foundation, accessed 12 December 2024. [https://cdn.adf.org.au/media/documents/DrugEducationSchools\\_ShortPP\\_Final1.pdf](https://cdn.adf.org.au/media/documents/DrugEducationSchools_ShortPP_Final1.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> The Lancet (2023) *Drug decriminalisation: grounding policy in evidence*, 402(10416):10416. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(23\)02617-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(23)02617-X/fulltext)