MEDICINAL CANNABIS IN AUSTRALIA, 2018: THE CANNABIS AS MEDICINE SURVEY (CAMS-18)

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Introduction and Aims: At the time of the first CAMS survey in 2016 the federal legislation to expand the cultivation, prescription, and use of cannabis for medical purposes was very new. The goal of the CAMS-18 survey was to measure how patterns of medical cannabis use have changed in the two years since the legislation was passed.

Approach and Key Findings: 1326 self-reported medical cannabis users completed an online survey, answering a range of questions related to medical cannabis.

The CAMS-18 cohort were slightly older (mean age=43.2±14.2 c/w 37.9±13.4 in CAMS-16) with a greater proportion of female (39.8% c/w 31.9% in CAMS-16) and university-educated (43.3% c/w 19.9% in CAMS-16) respondents. The most common conditions treated with medical cannabis were pain (47.3%), sleep (38.5%), and mental health problems (31.5%). Participants used an average of 15.8±11.5 days in the previous month and spent $80 weekly. Though inhalation was still the main form of cannabis ingestion, the proportion (70.8%) was lower than CAMS-16 (83.4%) suggesting the growing popularity of non-traditional routes of administration. Only 2.7% of respondents obtained their cannabis legally, with the most common reasons for not accessing legally being unawareness of its legality for treating some conditions or reluctance of medical practitioners to prescribe it, or prohibitive cost of legal cannabis.

Discussions and Conclusions: This survey indicates that many people are already using cannabis to either reduce symptoms or treat a wide range of medical conditions, and that the continued dominance of illicit sources of medical cannabis can be put down to lack of awareness of its legality for treating some conditions or reluctance of medical practitioners to prescribe it.

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