



RACHEL DAVID PAYNE ETTERS HANK

LEGALISE CANNABIS VICTORIA NEWSLETTER



January 2025



We acknowledge the Bunurong,
Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri Woi
Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation
as the first inhabitants and traditional
custodians of the lands
where we live, learn and work.

We pay our respect to all Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islanders and their cultures;
and to Elders past,
present and emerging.

THAT'S A WRAP 2024!

2024, what a year! The team at Legalise Cannabis Victoria felt pride, joy – and relief when we secured a law change to spare medicinal cannabis patients from automatic loss of driving license if they come up positive at a drug test.

Around 7,000 people fail roadside drug tests every year in Victoria. Loss of license hurts people's ability to go to work, do their job and consequently their income, and also their connection to community and family. This change will make a HUGE difference to the lives of thousands, and we are chuffed that a change we drove was supported in parliament by all the major parties and is now enshrined in Victoria's law. The change comes into effect in March 2025.

Next year we will go hard on securing a right for personal possession of cannabis. Thanks to our efforts, a parliamentary committee will review the personal use bill we introduced last year.

The committee will look at the bill's proposal to allow adults to possess small quantities of the drug for personal use and grow up to six plants. It will also look closely at the impacts of cannabis decriminalisation in the ACT. (The ACT this year declared the change a huge success with the number of people arrested on cannabis charges plummeting.) We believe Victoria's bill review will present the Allan government with a winning argument for cannabis reform.

Another coup for us in 2024 was the release of a Victorian report into workplace drug testing. It establishes that employees who have tested positive to THC have routinely lost their job or faced disciplinary action. This report was the result of a parliamentary



inquiry we fought for. It recommends WorkSafe develop a comprehensive alcohol and other drugs compliance code for businesses so that employee and employers are protected.

2024 was also the year the Victorian government announced a pill-testing service beginning at this summer's festival season. A fixed pilling testing centre will also be set up next year. Legalise Cannabis, the Greens and Animal Justice Party put forward a joint bill for pill testing in 2023 and we are so grateful the government has heeded our call.

This year Legalise Cannabis Victoria also secured an easing of restrictions for hemp growers. The Victorian Government will cut red tape by adopting recommendations from last year's hemp industry inquiry. This means hemp growing license applications have been streamlined for farmers and creating hemp products is easier!

You can read full reports on these wins in this newsletter.

CHANGE WE WON WILL PROTECT

MEDICINAL CANNABIS PATIENTS FROM

AUTOMATIC LOSS OF LICENCE

Legalise Cannabis Victoria has secured a change to the Road Safety Act that will protect medicinal cannabis patients from automatic loss of licence if they screen positive at a roadside drug test.

The amendment – which comes into effect in March 2025 – allows magistrates to exercise sentencing discretion for drivers who test positive for the cannabinoid chemical tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), if they hold a valid prescription for medicinal cannabis and are unimpaired while driving.

Under the old law even the tiniest trace of THC resulted in a six-month mandatory loss of licence for a first offence and Victorian magistrates had no power to intervene.

Both houses of parliament overwhelmingly supported our proposal, but it took work to achieve this change. In May, the Allan government announced yet another trial into the impacts of medicinal cannabis on driving – the fifth government-funded trial! This \$5 million study would not have delivered results until 2026, meaning no change of policy before the next state election.

We called the government out – the premier was intentionally stalling and we got lots of media attention. Brave people, who'd lost their licence, joined us to campaign for change.

In July, we put a motion (or a proposal) to Parliament's Upper House demanding a defence for patients with a valid script who are unimpaired behind the wheel. The government got on board and offered to

consider our request if we tabled a report based on wide consultation with legal and road safety experts.

The former Supervising Magistrate of the Victorian Drug Court, Tony Parsons compiled the Consultation Report: Medical Cannabis and Driving in Victoria, An Interim Proposal for Law Reform for us. It was based on in-depth consults with legal, medical and law enforcement experts – and the majority indicated loss of licence should not be mandatory.

We kept advocating for change in parliament, kept talking to the minister and the Premier – explaining that magistrates exercise judicial discretion every day for a range of driving charges and we wanted to extend this same basic right, 'a day in court', to medicinal cannabis patients who were simply taking a legal medication to treat legitimate ailments.

On October 31, when several amendments to the Road Safety Act came before the Upper House, our change was included: magistrates would be given the discretion, the power, to say, you are a medicinal cannabis patient, you have provided your script, and you weren't impaired behind the wheel – you get to keep your licence!

This is fantastic news for the thousands of Victorians prescribed medicinal cannabis and it's a huge step in the right direction for cannabis law reform.

PILL TESTING WILL SAVE LIVES

IN VICTORIA

In January, nine people were hospitalised for drug overdoses at a Melbourne music festival. Legalise Cannabis Victoria joined Animal Justice Party and the Greens in calling on the Victorian Labor Government to immediately set up pill testing across the state.

The three parties had already introduced a bill to Parliament that could have established pill testing in time for the summer festival season, alas there wasn't the support to get it passed.

Without pill testing, more and more young people would be put at greater risk of overdose and drug-related death. Victoria was seeing a rise in drug-related emergency department admissions and 46 overdose deaths in 2022 involving novel synthetic drugs.

Last year a coalition of 77 peak bodies, unions and health services, signed an open letter calling on the state government to implement pill testing and a public early warning system for dangerous drugs in circulation. Four state coronial reports also recommended establishing a pill testing service.

The evidence is clear and shows that pill testing services are well used and allow people to make informed choices about what they are consuming. Multiple experts have called for a sensible, health-led approach when it comes to totally preventable deaths related to drug-taking.

In June, we got the news we were hoping for: the Allan Labor Government announced it was introducing pill testing in Victoria for this summer.

First, an implementation trial will run for up to 18 months and include mobile and fixed site services, essentially bedding in the new service but pill testing is here to stay in Victoria.

It was an honor to advocate for this service, because it will save lives.

The mobile service will attend up to 10 music festivals and events throughout the trial period.

A fixed site will also open in mid-2025 – delivered in partnership with a community or tertiary health provider, operating with targeted hours, and located in an inner Melbourne area close to nightlife and transport.

Trained peer workers and technical experts will work there to provide personalised and confidential health information to help people make better, safer and more informed decisions.



THANKS TO LEGALISE CANNABIS, IT IS EASIER TO GROW HEMP IN VICTORIA

Hemp is a super crop, and its fibres can be used in building materials and textiles, while its seeds are protein rich (and delicious), but hemp regulations in Victoria have been so onerous they discourage farmers from growing hemp crops.

Legalise Cannabis Victoria this year made it easier to grow hemp in the state, but there's still work to be done. (Hemp is a cannabis plant but has low levels of THC.)

In Victoria, farmers need a license to grow the plant, the application process is long and complicated and there's a fee to pay, then crops are subjected to regular checks, and hemp products (like soap, even hemp seed biscuits) can't be produced on farm – the crop needs to be sent to an industrial premise for processing.

Meanwhile across the world there's a hemp renaissance with thousands of uses for this ancient crop being rediscovered – the international market for industrial hemp is projected to grow to \$18.6 billion by 2027.

We lobbied hard for the state to investigate the barriers to and rewards of more hemp cultivation. Parliament's Economy and Infrastructure Committee did this, and late last year the Inquiry into the industrial hemp industry in Victoria report was released.

It recommended a raft of changes, including standalone industrial hemp legislation (hemp-specific laws) to make it easier for to grow crops. Victoria, unlike most other states, does not have standalone legislation.

Not surprisingly, the state only has six hemp licence holders and much of what we produce is sent overseas for processing.



Not surprisingly, the state only has six hemp licence holders and much of what we produce is sent overseas for processing. In May, we introduced an Industrial Hemp Bill to parliament calling for a standalone act, and other changes like streamlining of licenses, and an adjustment to allow on-farm processing.

Ahead of the bill debate, we held a hemp showcase in the parliament building so ministers, MPs and their staff could see, touch and smell a range of useful (and beautiful) hemp products – clothes, shoes, hemp seed foods, soaps, shampoos and building materials like wall panelling and super strong hempcrete beams. They loved it and spoke about our showcase during the bill debate.

The government wanted more time to officially respond to the report, so we didn't ask the Upper House to vote on our bill but then in June the government came back. It gave 'in principle' support to six of the nine proposals in the report, including standalone hemp legislation – 'in principle' support means the government is still thinking how it could introduce these, but the minister did promise to fully implement two recommendations.

The government has directed Agriculture Victoria to streamline the licensing process

and its defined hemp products as part of the rural sector to goods can be produced on-farm – great news for cottage industries. It means famers can value add to their crop on-farm and walk away with more cash in their pocket.

Legalise Cannabis are now pushing for the government to provide funding to set up a hemp processing co-operative in Victoria. How great would it be if communities that once relied on native timber logging could

VICTORIAN BILL REVIEW TO PRESENT CASE FOR LEGALISING CANNABIS – AND LOOK AT THE ACT

Legalise Cannabis Victoria will bring the debate about legalising cannabis back to the Victorian Parliament in 2025.

We lobbied for and secured a review of the personal use bill we introduced in late 2023.

Parliament's Legal and Social Issues Committee will consider and report on our *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Regulation of Personal Adult Use of Cannabis) Bill 2023* – that means reform is back on the agenda in Victoria!

The committee will look at the bill's proposal to allow adults to possess small quantities of the drug for personal use and grow up to six plants, and the impacts of the decriminalisation of cannabis in the ACT.

There is clearly a bipartisan appetite for expert advice, community engagement, and evidence-based action. Taking our bill through the committee process will allow us to hear from top specialists, consult with the broader community and review the evidence, as well as looking at the ACT experience.

When we first debated our bill in 2023, the

government said it was 'amenable to ongoing discussions' while the opposition said it needed 'more data'.

This bill review will encourage discussion and deliver more data. It will make clear what needs to happen.

In 2024, we also presented a petition to the Parliament signed by around 3,000 people to 'allow consumption and possession of small quantities of cannabis'.

It only took us a handful of days in the community to collect these signatures – a testament to just how many people are sick and tired of the prohibition of cannabis.

In the latest National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 80 per cent of Aussies said that possession of cannabis should not be a criminal offence – that equates to roughly four and a half million Victorians. One in three Victorians have a firsthand experience with cannabis. Attitudes towards cannabis are changing and the law needs to change too.


When the bill review is underway in February, we want to generate discussion in the media and social media around legalising.


Would you like to help us? We are on the lookout for personal stories about cannabis. We particularly want to hear from anyone who has come into contact with police and the courts for consuming cannabis. We want to share these stories on social media and in the media. We can hide your identity so you can talk about your story anonymously, but we hope some people will be prepared to be named, photographed and videoed. We know we are asking a lot but if you are up for this, please email: christine.tondorf@parliament.vic.gov.au

We will give you every support to tell your story and discuss whether you want to do this online or talk to journalists – and whether you want to reveal your identity or be anonymous. The choice is yours. We are excited about bringing the discussion on cannabis back to Victoria – bring on 2025 and cannabis reform.

MEDIA FOR LEGALISE CANNABIS VICTORIA IN 2024


IN JANUARY, following a mass drug overdose at a Melbourne music festival, Legalise Cannabis joined the Greens and Animal Justice in calling for pill testing.

 [Beat Magazine: Victorian parties renew call for drug testing after music festival overdoses](#)

 [The Age: No drugs found in most searches](#)


 [Sky News: Jacinta Allan issues message to festival goers](#)

IN FEBRUARY, the government received a report on CBD drug use, but did not release it. Legalise Cannabis introduced a motion to parliament demanding the report be released.

 [HeraldSun: Legalise Cannabis introduced a motion that the Upper House supported, demanding the government to release the report](#)


 [Sky News Allan-government told to hand over ken lays report](#)

IN MARCH, the government received a report on CBD drug use, but did not release it. Legalise Cannabis introduced a motion to parliament demanding the report be released.

 [The Age: The documents Labor won't hand over and how it gets away with it](#)

IN APRIL, we celebrated 420 cannabis day and spoke out against heavy handed policing at the Melbourne gathering – and we warned the government that arrests at 420 celebrations threatened our working relationship.


 [The HeraldSun: Legalise Cannabis MPs threaten to withdraw Allan government crossbench support after weed rally](#)

 [3aw: Legalise Cannabis MP hits out at top cop over upcoming 420 event](#)

In 2024 Legalise Cannabis Victoria had some 820 media mentions (across TV, radio, online and print) reaching an audience in excess of 25 million – as of 11/12/24.

IN MAY, the Victorian government announced a fifth research project into the effects of medicinal cannabis on driving, but no protection for medicinal cannabis patients who test positive at roadside drug tests. We called out the Allan Government for stalling and got LOTS of media attention!!!

 [The Guardian: Victoria's 'world-first' medical cannabis driving trial to finish in late 2025, disappointing advocates](#)

 [SBS: Medicinal cannabis patients say road rule discriminate](#)


 [ABC: MP says medicinal cannabis drivers are 'weeping' over lengthy trial](#)

IN MAY, we also travelled north to Nimbin for MardiGrass, the national protest against prohibition.

 [L City News: Mardi Grass continues the war on prohibition](#)

IN MAY, Legalise Cannabis also introduced a private members bill to parliament calling for reforms to make it easier for farmers to grow hemp. Our efforts were applauded by regional and rural media, and we held a hemp showcase in parliament house.

 [Victorian Farmers Federation: Hemp Bill gives Victorian farmers opportunity to grow](#)

 [Stock and Land: Hemp growers help a push for easier licensing and export](#)

IN JUNE, the Victorian premier heeded our calls and announced pill testing was coming to Victoria!

 [Stock and Land: Hemp growers help a push for easier licensing and export](#)

 [National Tribune: Progressive Crossbench Welcome Pill Testing](#)

IN JULY, we launched an intense campaign to convince the government to protect medicinal cannabis patients from automatic loss of licence if they testing positive to THC at a roadside stop.

We appeared on the ABC, Seven Network, Nine, in The Age, HeraldSun, 3AW, SBS – you name the media outlet, and we were there. And the story got a lot of coverage from regional and rural media.

 [SBS: Medicinal cannabis users say road rules discriminate against them](#)

 [The Age: The simple tweak that could allow medicinal cannabis users to drive](#)

 [HeraldSun: Allan govt heeds AFL coaching greats' call for urgent driving law](#)

IN AUGUST, we continued our campaign targeting suburban and regional media outlets – and were part of a national feature

 [Star Weekly: Cannabis testing change mooted agrees to drug checking trial](#)

 [The Australian: How a script for medicinal cannabis ended a 27-year health battle](#)


IN AUGUST, In August we also worked with a small community battling to stop a multinational building a monster freight terminal on rare grasslands that are home to endangered fauna. Reports run by every major media outlet may have helped, as the developer has now pulled out of the project.

 [ABC: Little River residents are fighting a proposal to build major freight terminal on their doorstep](#)

IN SEPTEMBER, it was announced that Fiona Patten would be Legalise Cannabis's Victorian senate candidate.

 [HeraldSun: Patten back for her next battle](#)

IN SEPTEMBER, the parliamentary report into workplace drug testing was released – another one we fought for.

 [HeraldSun: Call for change to Vic workplace drug testing laws as medicinal cannabis use explodes](#)

IN OCTOBER, the law was changed in Victoria – medicinal cannabis patients will no longer be subject to mandatory loss of license

 [The Age: Victoria may end automatic licence loss for drivers testing positive for cannabis](#)

 [The Guardian: Drivers to escape punishment over medical cannabis under interim Victorian proposal](#)

 [ABC: Amendment to allow Victorian medicinal cannabis users to drive passes](#)

IN NOVEMBER, we applauded the latest findings of the Pennington Institute report, which called for legalising cannabis.e.

 [Daily Liberal: Cannabis 'policy muddle' requires clarity: report](#)

We also campaigned for better bus services for Victorians.

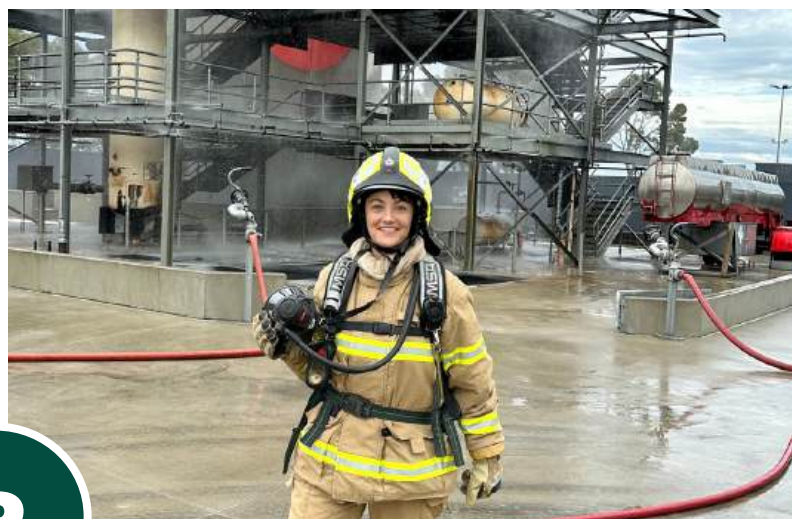
 [Australasian Bus & Coach: Should Melbourne have a free bus network?](#)

 [Westsider: It's time buses took us somewhere we want to go](#)

IN DECEMBER, with parliament sittings finished for the year MPs David Ettershank and Rachel Payne shifted their media focus to local electoral issues.

 [Star News: Invasive weed flooding local park](#)

 [Star News: Library upgrade a hot topic](#)



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