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# Cannabis Clinics Won't Solve Anything For Those Who Can't Afford It



**Medicinal marijuana advocates have cautiously welcomed the opening of cannabis clinics in Australian cities, but warn they will do little to solve issues around access and cost for patients who benefit from the drug.**

A company called Cannabis Access Clinics has opened locations in Sydney and Melbourne in recent months, with its Brisbane office launching this week.

The clinics are the first of their kind in Australia, aimed at helping patients navigate a confusing access system around the controversial and little-prescribed drug.

Currently, patients need approval from state and federal regulators to access medicinal cannabis products, and many have criticised the access avenues as complicated -- even doctors report they aren't sure how to prescribe the drug.

Experts estimate thousands of people across the country are self-medicating with cannabis products to treat conditions ranging from seizures to chronic pain, but only very small numbers -- mostly terminally ill people or children with severe epilepsy -- have been given approval to access the drug legally.

Cannabis advocates -- including some who grow their own product to treat various ailments -- have cautiously welcomed the expansion of the clinics, but said the businesses alone won't fix a myriad of issues around access and affordability.



(Getty Images)

Some even said the idea of having specialised cannabis clinics, instead of GPs prescribing the product in a timely fashion, was "silly".

"We're kind of getting there. People will be grateful for something," Grace Sands, of the Queensland-based Medical Cannabis Advisory Group, told ten daily.

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"It's something for at least people whose doctors don't want to go through the process. It may help some people access the products but very expensive. It hits hardest the people who are already sick, who already have so many extra costs."

Gail Hester, also of the MCUA, said the current access for cannabis was "a long and convoluted system that seems to change by the week."

While the clinics service capital cities, there are fears those living a long distance from the cities, or who cannot travel far



(Reuters)

The clinics require a GP referral, and will charge patients a \$300 initial consultation fee. Each prescription can cost up to \$600 a month, and some patients may have two, three or more different prescriptions to treat various conditions. Cannabis is not yet available under the pharmaceutical benefits scheme, which subsidises medication costs.

"Many probably couldn't afford to apply especially if there is no guarantee they will get approval. People can't take that financial risk. So they remain living in fear and continue to suffer," Hester said.



Katrina Spraggon and daughter Kaitlyn

The clinics were a "step in the right direction" but the cost for clinic-supplied cannabis will be a major stumbling block for many patients, said QLD mum Katrina Spraggon.

"No patient will be able to afford it. My daughter is on three products, so that would be \$1800 per month for medicine that I grow and make it for free," she told ten daily.

Katrina's daughter, Kaitlyn, experiences violent and potentially fatal seizures linked to epilepsy. A mix of cannabis products, which Katrina sources herself, has soothed Kaitlyn's symptoms.

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"We're getting it for free, and so many people are growing it. It's just throwing a seed in and watering your garden."

Lucy Haslam, a cannabis advocate who lives in western NSW, said she welcomed the clinics being expanded but said the capital city locations did little to assist those living outside metropolitan areas.

"I don't think they'll meet the needs of most Australians and it's silly we have special clinics when GPs should be doing it on daily basis," she told ten daily.

"It seems like anything with medical cannabis has to be over-complicated and expensive, and fall short of meeting needs of most patients."

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