



# Administration of medicinal cannabis

## Quality use and safety considerations

Best practice principles to guide the safe and effective administration of medicinal cannabis to support high-quality patient care.

### Key messages

- In Australia, medicinal cannabis products are not recommended as a first-line treatment for any health condition.
- As there are only two products on the [Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods \(ARTG\)](#), most medicinal cannabis products:
  - are unapproved therapeutic goods, and not included in the ARTG
  - have not been assessed by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) for safety, quality, performance or effectiveness, and
  - should only be considered when all other treatment options are unavailable or unsuitable.
- The quality of evidence supporting medicinal cannabis varies by clinical indication and product type. For many conditions, evidence remains limited and comparative effectiveness relative to established therapies remains uncertain. Medicinal cannabis is not recommended as monotherapy or first-line treatment for any condition in Australia.
- Limited evidence suggests that adjunctive medicinal cannabis may be more effective than placebo in reducing seizures in children with epilepsy.
- Individualised assessment of potential benefit versus harm is required when considering the use of medicinal cannabis.
- Complexity in the supply, handling, storage and labelling of medicinal cannabis products reflects the status of most as unapproved and Schedule 8 (S8) products.
- A set of [best practice principles for the administration of medicinal cannabis](#) have been developed for nurses.
- [Table 1](#) includes quality use and safety considerations as well as risk mitigation actions relevant to the administration of medicinal cannabis products by nurses.

Further information is available through the TGA [online portal: Medicinal cannabis - guidance documents](#) and relevant National Board [resources](#) including the [Medicinal cannabis supply](#) guidance.

### Purpose

This fact sheet provides best practice principles to guide nurses on the safe and effective administration of medicinal cannabis products across hospital, aged care and community settings. It focuses on medication safety best practice principles and legislative requirements to support high-quality patient care.



## Scope

This fact sheet applies to the use of medicinal cannabis products, including the two products on the ARTG and all the unregistered products accessed through the [TGA unapproved access pathways](#). [Table 1](#) includes a list of proposed risks mitigation actions for nurses to support safe and appropriate administration of medicinal cannabis products. This list is not exhaustive and should be supported by additional evidence. This is especially important for specific patient cohorts, such as older people, pregnant and breastfeeding individuals and people with certain medical conditions.

This fact sheet is part of a suite of resources including fact sheets for [prescribers](#) and [pharmacists](#) and draws on the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care's (the Commission's) [Medicinal cannabis safety and quality report](#).

## Background

Medicinal cannabis products are therapeutic products that contain or are derived from any part of the *Cannabis* plant and generally contain cannabidiol (CBD) and/or delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), or their corresponding acids. There are more than 1,400 different unapproved medicinal cannabis products accessed in Australia with varying CBD and THC content. Medicinal cannabis products are not a single therapeutic entity. Products may contain predominantly CBD, THC, or combinations of both. THC containing products are associated with greater risks of cognitive impairment, psychosis, driving impairment and dependence, whereas CBD dominant products generally have a lower risk profile but may still cause adverse effects and clinically significant medicine interactions.

Formulations that have been accessed include oral oils, capsules, sublingual products and mucosal sprays.

Medicinal cannabis has been prescribed for use in the following conditions:

- epilepsy
- prevention or management of chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting
- multiple sclerosis
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- insomnia
- chronic non-cancer pain, and
- pain and other symptom management in palliative care.

There are currently two medicinal cannabis products included in the ARTG for specific conditions:

- CBD (Epidyolex)
- nabiximols (Sativex Oromucosal Spray).

All other medicinal cannabis products are unapproved, with limited evidence supporting their therapeutic use. As these products have not been assessed by the TGA for safety, quality, performance or effectiveness, they do not have approved Product Information (PI) or Consumer Medicines Information (CMI).

Evidence supporting medicinal cannabis is often derived from specific pharmaceutical-grade products and may not be generalisable to products with different cannabinoid concentrations, formulations or routes of administration.

The supply, handling, storage, labelling and administration of medicinal cannabis products are subject to regulatory requirements and guidelines. As most medicinal cannabis products are S8 medicines, these requirements may vary between states and territories.



## The key issues

In Australia, medicinal cannabis is not recommended as a first-line treatment for any health condition. It should only be considered when established treatment options are ineffective, unsuitable or unavailable. It should not be relied upon as sole therapy for any condition.

Medicinal cannabis may be prescribed by medical and nurse practitioners, and designated registered nurse prescribers where authorised under relevant legislation and professional requirements. Designated registered nurse prescribers must prescribe in partnership with an authorised health practitioner in accordance with a prescribing agreement.

However, inappropriate prescribing of medicinal cannabis has been associated with adverse patient outcomes. In addition, adverse effects may occur even when medicinal cannabis is prescribed appropriately.

Many of the products available in Australia contain high concentrations of THC, which may increase the risk of harm, including acute psychosis, cannabis use disorder and impaired driving ability. Caution and monitoring is required in adolescents and young adults, people with a personal or family history of psychosis, and people with bipolar disorder or other serious mental health conditions, as THC containing products may worsen psychiatric symptoms.

Emerging evidence suggests THC containing medicinal cannabis products may also be associated with cardiovascular effects including tachycardia, orthostatic hypotension, arrhythmias and acute coronary events. Additional caution may be required in older adults and people with cardiovascular disease.

If an approved ARTG-listed product is not suitable and where clinically appropriate, unapproved products may be accessed via the TGA's [Special Access Scheme \(SAS\)](#), the [Authorised Prescriber \(AP\)](#) pathway or by participating in a clinical trial. The TGA has resources and guidance on access to approved and unapproved medicinal cannabis products at the [medicinal cannabis hub](#).

## Best practice principles for the administration of medicinal cannabis

Nurses are well placed to evaluate patient adherence and monitor adverse effects for medicinal cannabis products. The following principles provide a guide to safe and effective administration of medicinal cannabis:

1. **Check there is a legitimate clinical indication.** Medicinal cannabis is not recommended as first-line treatment for any medical condition in Australia.
2. **Ensure a comprehensive clinical assessment has been completed.**
3. **Be aware of the most evidence-informed indications** (albeit, the evidence is not strong) as follows:
  - Chronic pain (particularly some neuropathic pain)
  - Chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting
  - Multiple sclerosis-related spasticity
  - Some refractory epilepsies
  - Palliative care symptom management.
4. **Obtain informed consent**, ensuring the patient understands that many products are not approved, their benefits may be uncertain, and adverse effects can occur. Patients should also be informed that costs are generally not subsidised through the [Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme \(PBS\)](#) and that product use may affect their legal ability to drive.



5. **Follow a “start low, go slow” principle**, beginning with the lowest effective dose and titrating gradually. Non-inhaled products such as oils, capsules and oral liquids are preferred over inhaled products with slower onset and longer duration of effect. Smoking is problematic as it is contraindicated in smoke free areas.
6. **Monitor for efficacy and adverse effects.**
7. **Develop an exit strategy**, planning for scenarios where treatment benefits are insufficient, risks outweigh benefits, adverse effects or harm emerge, or misuse is suspected.
8. **Ensure continuity of care**, e.g. coordinating with local primary care services at discharge.

## Safe and appropriate administration of medicinal cannabis

[Table 1](#) includes quality use and safety considerations and risk mitigation actions relevant to the administration of medicinal cannabis products. Designated registered nurse prescribers and nurse practitioners are also directed to the prescriber fact sheet and the relevant [medicinal cannabis prescribing](#) guidance provided by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia.

## Useful resources

- Australian Cannabis Nurses Association (ACNA). 2025. [Nursing scope of practice guidelines](#).
- Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). 2025. [Medicinal cannabis prescribing](#)
- Best Practice Advocacy Centre New Zealand (bpac<sup>nz</sup>). 2022. [Medicinal Cannabis Special Edition](#).
- McIntosh N, Wilson NJ, Povalej P, Hunt L, Lewis P. An Exploration of Registered Nurses' Experiences Caring for Patients Taking Medicinal Cannabis. *Nurs Open*. 2024 Oct;11(10):e70063.
- Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. 2026. [Medicinal cannabis safety and quality report](#).
- The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia – [Guidance on medicinal cannabis prescribing targets unsafe practice](#).

## For more information

Refer to your local medicines and poisons regulator for state/territory medicinal cannabis specific requirements for prescribing, handling, dispensing, administration and use or visit: [safetyandquality.gov.au/medicinal-cannabis](https://safetyandquality.gov.au/medicinal-cannabis)

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**Table 1** Quality use and safety considerations and risk mitigation actions for the administration of medicinal cannabis.

| Quality use and safety considerations                                                                          | Risk mitigation actions for nurses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
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| <b>Comply with established governance processes and adhere to legislative state and territory requirements</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adhere to the <a href="#">legislation in relevant state or territory</a> which governs the appropriate use of medicinal cannabis.</li> <li>• Maintain high standards of clinical practice and professional conduct when administering medicinal cannabis products to patients. Nurses must follow the standards, codes and guidelines established by the <a href="#">Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia Professional Standards</a>.</li> <li>• Adhere to medicinal cannabis charting processes and order verification requirements for safe administration.</li> <li>• Prioritise <a href="#">person-centred</a> goals around medication administration and ensure that <a href="#">informed consent</a> has already been obtained from the patient, their family or carer.</li> <li>• Where a patient lacks decision-making capacity, ensure consent requirements have been addressed in accordance with relevant legislation, substitute decision-making arrangements and local organisational policies.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Participate and maintain workforce capability through education and training</b>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete appropriate education and competency-based training on medicinal cannabis that addresses the pharmacology, product types and route-specific administration requirements.</li> <li>• Keep up to date with current research into medicinal cannabis to inform safe practice. Completed education and training can be incorporated into an individual nurse's <a href="#">continuing professional development (CPD)</a>.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Embed safe and accurate administration practices</b>                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When administering medicines, nurses must comply with relevant state and territory legislative requirements and be guided by organisational policies and protocols. Nurses must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ confirm a valid medicinal cannabis medication order is present</li> <li>○ confirm patient identity using approved identifiers; name, address and date of birth</li> <li>○ assess for sedation, cognitive impairment or clinical instability</li> <li>○ confirm no documented contraindications, potential drug or disease interactions or withholding instructions exist</li> <li>○ adhere to medication administration rights</li> <li>○ use suitable measuring devices appropriate for the dosage form (e.g. for liquid formulations)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

| Quality use and safety considerations                        | Risk mitigation actions for nurses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
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|                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ administer via prescribed route only</li> <li>○ match product to medication chart, where applicable</li> <li>○ verify product name (brand), formulation and strength (CBD/THC concentration)</li> <li>○ confirm dose, route and frequency of administration</li> <li>○ collaborate with prescribers and pharmacists to ensure safe and effective medicine use</li> <li>○ retrieve and store products from secure storage in accordance with policy</li> <li>○ check expiry date and product integrity prior to administration</li> <li>○ follow high-risk medicine checking procedures</li> <li>○ follow independent double-check procedures, where applicable</li> <li>○ counsel the patient, their family or carer and provide education as needed including driving precautions</li> <li>○ verify the patient's understanding of their treatment, self-administration technique and awareness of driving and impairment advice</li> <li>○ ensure patients are aware of the driving laws in each state and territory and that legally prescribed medicinal cannabis products containing THC may result in driving offences. More information can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Establish secure storage and access control processes</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To prevent diversion, loss or unauthorised access of medicinal cannabis, nurses must:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ store medicinal cannabis in accordance with legislative and organisational requirements noting most products are S8 medicines</li> <li>○ store according to local hospital, community or residential aged care setting policies. Refer to <a href="#">Principles for the safe selection and storage of medicines</a></li> <li>○ maintain controlled access during handling</li> <li>○ dispose of expired or unwanted medicines according to state and territory requirements</li> <li>○ maintain a register for stock control according to state and territory requirements</li> <li>○ in the community settings, confirm patient's safe storage in the home, particularly where there is a risk of access by children.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

| Quality use and safety considerations | Risk mitigation actions for nurses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
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|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluating safety and assessing progress of medicinal cannabis use. Nurses must:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ observe for adverse effects following administration and throughout the course of treatment, e.g. sedation, dizziness, behavioural changes or deterioration</li> <li>○ monitor for psychiatric adverse effects including worsening anxiety, behavioural disturbance, paranoia, hallucinations or psychotic symptoms, particularly in patients receiving THC containing products or those with known psychiatric risk factors</li> <li>○ escalate concerns regarding new or worsening psychosis, suicidal ideation, significant cognitive impairment, severe behavioural change or suspected cannabis use disorder through established clinical governance pathways</li> <li>○ monitor for cardiovascular effects such as tachycardia, palpitations, dizziness, orthostatic hypotension, chest pain or syncope and escalate concerns promptly</li> <li>○ monitor for long-term safety concerns including cognitive impairment, reduced functional capacity, occupational impairment, development of tolerance, dependence, cannabis use disorder and withdrawal symptoms</li> <li>○ document clinical observations as required</li> <li>○ report any adverse effects to the prescriber</li> <li>○ monitor if medical cannabis is achieving intended results and if not, communicate with prescriber to facilitate review</li> <li>○ assess patient, family or carer understanding, patient concordance and understanding of what constitutes a positive clinical response to medicinal cannabis</li> <li>○ evaluate appropriateness of routes of administration and document response</li> <li>○ escalate concerns via established clinical governance pathways</li> <li>○ report medication incidents and near misses through organisational reporting systems.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Report adverse events                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report any suspected adverse events resulting from medicinal cannabis use via the TGA's online <a href="#">Adverse Event Reporting</a> portal. Adverse events reported to the TGA are generally included in the publicly available <a href="#">Database of Adverse Events Notifications (DAEN) - Medicines</a>. Reporting of adverse events for unapproved products is encouraged. However, for pharmaceutical companies there are fewer rules requiring the reporting of adverse events, in contrast to registered medicines where there is a regulatory obligation to report. Therefore, the number and nature of the reports for unapproved medicinal cannabis products on the DAEN cannot be used to accurately estimate or compare the safety risks associated with using them.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

| Quality use and safety considerations                                       | Risk mitigation actions for nurses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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| <p><b>Ensure timely communication and consistent continuity of care</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report any adverse effects to the prescriber and dispensing pharmacist.</li> <li>• Maintain accurate and contemporaneous records to support traceability and continuity of care. Nurses must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ communicate medicinal cannabis administration during shift handover in hospital and residential care homes</li> <li>○ ensure administration inclusion in care records, transfer or discharge documentation</li> <li>○ document and communicate any monitoring requirements</li> <li>○ verify ongoing supply arrangements (e.g. coordination with hospital/community pharmacy). Medicinal cannabis products are not routinely stocked. Verify ongoing supply arrangements and communicate any potential interruptions to the treating team, patient, family or carer during transitions of care</li> </ul> </li> <li>• document communication with the patient, their family or carer, prescribers and pharmacists as required.</li> </ul> |