

**MEDIA RELEASE – 19 APRIL 2024**

***New data on cannabis availability, use and treatment from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare further supports the urgent need for sensible cannabis regulation.***

Following the release of new data from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Penington Institute is calling for urgent attention from governments to reduce community harms by introducing a regulated cannabis market for adult use.

The AIHW *Trends in Cannabis Availability, Use, and Treatment in Australia, 2013–14 to 2021–22* report reveals findings in cannabis availability, use and treatment that over the last decade, cannabis has remained readily available and potent.

The report shows that despite recreational cannabis remaining illicit, it has become more accessible to Australians over the past decade. Around one in four (25 per cent) Australians aged 14 and over said they were offered or had the opportunity to use cannabis in the past year in 2022–2023, up from 18 per cent in 2010.

Penington Institute CEO John Ryan said the findings demonstrate the need for governments to urgently consider regulated frameworks for cannabis.

“Given cannabis is already so easily accessed by Australians through criminal pathways, our attention must turn to the harms this brings. For example, products sold by criminals may contain dangerous contaminants that would simply not exist in a safe regulated market,” said My Ryan.

Findings from the report also reveal an increase in lifetime cannabis use, especially among women, with 37.9 per cent of women aged 14 and older having used cannabis at least once in their lifetime, up from 30.9 per cent in 2013. Lifetime use for all Australians aged 14 and older has also increased from 34.8 per cent to 40.6 per cent since 2013.

Mr Ryan said trends such as these also support the need for a move towards cannabis regulation.

“The reality is that cannabis is one of Australia’s most widely used drugs with fewer harms associated with it than most. Yet everyday people who use it are criminalised and put at risk in the current system,” said Mr Ryan.

“Instead of continuing to pursue people as though they are criminals, we could easily regulate cannabis which would mean people would access a safer product through known sources.”

Penington Institute research released last month, of more than 1,500 Victorians, found that 54 per cent were in favour of a carefully regulated cannabis market for adult use. Only 21 per cent of respondents said that current laws worked well to prevent harm from drugs.

“The community is ready for change, for a different and better approach to cannabis,” Mr Ryan said. “Our current approach is not only out of step with community sentiment but is harmful in many ways.”

Penington Institute is calling on the government to make the regulation of cannabis markets a critical priority to protect Australians from unnecessary harms. A regulated market for cannabis would control the origin and potency of products, as well monitoring who is accessing them, helping to provide support and reduce the risk of health harms.

“We believe that an open and rational conversation about the regulation, impact and uses of cannabis in its many forms should be a national priority,” Mr Ryan said.

“We are not promoting cannabis use by exploring cannabis regulation. The fact is that millions of Australians use cannabis and there must be a framework to recognise that reality and minimise harm to individuals and the community.”

Mr Ryan said that Penington Institute is currently working in consultation with experts and the community on extensive modelling about how a regulated cannabis market would work to reduce community harms. He said they look forward to opportunities to share that modelling with legislators and policymakers.

**Media contact:** Anna Northey ([a.northey@penington.org.au](mailto:a.northey@penington.org.au) / +61 400 640 622)

*Penington Institute is an independent public health non-profit organisation with expertise in drug policy, research and community education. For further information go to [www.penington.org.au](http://www.penington.org.au).*

**John Ryan is available for interview.**

*John Ryan is a leader in public health and safety and the inaugural CEO of Penington Institute. John actively works to promote sensible approaches to drug use in the community including with media and by providing expert advice including to governments.*