

I am writing to the committee today to share my own experiences with medicinal cannabis and how it's changed my life for the better. I also want to address a few concerns I have regarding how hard it can be to access medicinal cannabis, and also the amount you have to pay to get it. Firstly I thought I would introduce myself, and write a brief summary about my chronic health journey, that led me to where I am today.

My name is Shenae Gardner,

I am 28 and a devoted wife and mother, who lives with daily chronic pain due to multiple health conditions. I have hip dysplasia, arthritis and I also have an ileostomy bag due to a bowel condition. Both illnesses can cause me regular pain, which can be on a level anywhere from mild to excruciating. I know for a fact that this pain does not define me, it may be part of me but it will no longer control who I am.

About 2 and a half years ago, I reached a point in my life where I was physically and mentally fed up. I had to have 2 major surgeries done within 12 months of one another, which led me to needing a walking frame on and off for about 1 and a half years. I was on so many Pain medications, most of them were narcotics. Unfortunately these medications tended to cause me more harm than good, I had terrible side effects from them and my doses would constantly get increased the more my body built up a tolerance to them. All well and good being on medication if they help you, however the medications would only work for a short amount of time and they actually started to cause stomach ulcers. I felt that there had to be another less toxic, yet effective way to help manage my pain

I decided enough is enough! I can't go through this pain anymore, surely there's a safer type of medicine that I can take that will actually work? I started researching more about medicinal cannabis. I had heard a lot of good things about it especially for pain management, however I knew it wasn't easy to get, as only some doctors in Perth could prescribe it. I posted on an Australian group page just saying if anyone could give me more info on it and if it's something they think I will benefit from. The next day a lady reached out to me and said she could help me, I was rushed with emotions as I knew this was the last hope for me to get relief from my pain.

The lady was such an incredible woman, all she wanted was for me to get better and be pain free. She told me about a trial that was being done for medicinal cannabis through a university, however she mentioned that it was hard to be a part of it as only certain doctors signed up for it. The lady said that if I got access to the trial, I would be able to get the cannabis prescribed at a reduced rate. I booked an appointment with my GP straight away to see if he could help. I went to my GP the following week, he said that he could actually prescribe the cannabis for me, however it was going to cost me \$300 just for 1 bottle. My GP unfortunately was not participating in this trial, so I had to do more research to find a doctor that could register me for the trial. After a couple of months, I found a doctor that was a part of the trial and we soon started the process of getting me the medication.

It has been nearly 9 months since I have started using the oil and the results I have seen are fantastic. I am not taking any more opiates, which is amazing as because of taking them for so long I have suffered damage to my organs which has now caused me to have a stomach ulcer.

I take two different types of medicinal cannabis CBD during the day and THC at night time, as THC is what helps with my pain the most.

Even though medicinal cannabis is now legal I still have a few concerns, in regards to taking it. One of my main concerns is "legally" you are still not allowed to drive while using medicinal cannabis.

I understand it may cause drowsiness, however any prescribed pain killers can cause drowsiness, yet you can still legally drive while taking them so why is it different with cannabis? Also, even if you were to drive the following day after having THC it could still show up in your saliva. Most CBD oils still contain traces of THC which would still show up on a saliva test as well, however you are legally able to drive on CBD. I really feel the rules and regulations around this need to change. Whether it may be a matter of a time limit in which you can't drive a motor vehicle if you've had the THC oil. Or possibly a permit that you keep in your car that allows you to drive while taking medicinal cannabis based on getting the permission from your doctor to do so.

I really think the stigma and awareness around medicinal cannabis needs to change. The amount of people I meet with other chronic health conditions that didn't even know it was possible to get medicinal cannabis prescribed or that there were trials available is crazy. Every GP should be able to easily give their patients access to the medication if they meet the necessary criteria. Unfortunately medicinal cannabis is still very expensive, which stops a lot of people from going on it when it could be so beneficial for their health. I personally think that if you are required to use medicinal cannabis regularly, you should be able to purchase it at a discounted rate.

At the end of day I still have my condition that causes me ongoing pain, however medicinal cannabis has allowed me to manage my pain in a much safer and healthier manner. I am forever grateful for this magical plant, and I hope my story can help others see how much of an incredible impact medicinal cannabis can have on your life.