

An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health
Secretary General



Mr Alex Alino
Petitions Case Manager
Joint Committee on Public Petitions and the Ombudsmen
By email only to: jcpp@oireachtas.ie

RE: Petition No: P00043-25 “Cannabis regulation and expansion of the Medical Cannabis Access Programme”.

9 January 2026

Dear Mr. Alino,

I acknowledge receipt of follow-up correspondence from Mr Ashley Martin-Guerriero dated 3 December 2025 in relation to Petition P00043-25.

I set out below a response to a number of points and queries raised therein:

i. **‘Medical Cannabis must not be conflated with general drug use’**

From the outset I wish to clarify that the recommendation by the Citizens’ Assembly on Drugs that the Ireland moves to a comprehensive health-led response to drugs use is in respect of illicit drug use only. As Mr Martin-Guerriero notes, cannabis for medical use should be distinguished from the use of illicit drugs for recreational purposes. As such, it is inappropriate to refer to any proposed expanded access to medical cannabis under the Misuse of Drugs Act and regulations as a health-led response to drug use.

The role of the Misuse of Drugs Acts 1977-2016 and Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2017 in the context of cannabis for medical use is significant. The legislative framework sets out the exemptive authority for the possession of controlled drugs, who can possess, supply, prescribe them, and who can administer them.

Under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2017 (SI 173/2017) Cannabis is a Schedule 1 controlled drug, subject to the strictest levels of control and availability is only under licence from the Minister for Health. Separate products which are available under the Medical Cannabis Access Programme (MCAP) are classified as Schedule 2 controlled drugs.

As such there are currently two ways that patients and prescribers can access cannabis for medical use.

ii. **'The evidence (to support cannabis for medical use) is not 8 years old'**

It is important to note that the cannabis-based products which may be supplied under Ministerial Licence application, or the MCAP are not authorised medicines approved by national or international medicine regulators. Therefore, they are not subject to the same evidence-based analysis or monitoring as authorised medications.

In response to this the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) submitted its scientific advice on the use of cannabis for medical purposes to the Department of Health in 2017. It is acknowledged that owing to the passage of time, any consideration given to an expansion of the MCAP to other conditions should be based on up to date, robust evidence that cannabis may prove beneficial.

In my previous correspondence I noted that the Department of Health intends to review access to cannabis for medical use. This will include access to Schedule 2 cannabis products under the MCAP and Schedule 1 cannabis products under Ministerial Licence. To support this process the Health Research Board (HRB) undertook an international evidence review which it published in January 2024. The Department of Health recognises the importance of the HRB's input into the review process and its evidence review is publicly available on the HRB website at:

https://www.hrb.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/HRB_Medicinal_cannabis_Final_Report-1.pdf

I can advise that as part of the review into cannabis for medical use, the intention is to:

- review the current operation of the MCAP and availability of Schedule 2 cannabis products.
- examine the appropriateness to expand the range of conditions covered by the programme, where sufficient evidence exists that cannabis may prove beneficial. The HRB's evidence review will form an important basis for these considerations.
- review the current access to Schedule 1 cannabis products and the current operation of the ministerial licences.
- develop a national policy on the access to, and administration of cannabis products that are subject to ministerial licence.

It is intended that the Minister of Health will appoint a suitable candidate to chair the Review early in 2026. It is then anticipated that the Review will conclude in 2026, with recommendations made to the Minister on future policy approaches to the MCAP and Ministerial Licence applications.

iii. **Request for information on the Expert Reference Group**

In March 2017 the Minister for Health, established an Expert Reference Group to advise on the development of the MCAP.

The Group, chaired by Dr Mairín Ryan, Director of Health Technology Assessment at the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), included expert representation from the areas of oncology, palliative care, anaesthesiology, general practice, adult neurology, paediatric neurology, psychiatry, pharmacy, patients, and ethics as well as representatives from HIQA, the HPRA, the National Medicines Information Centre and the Department of Health.

Following detailed consideration of the available clinical evidence and a targeted consultation, the Expert Reference Group developed clinical guidance for healthcare professionals treating patients through the MCAP. This is publicly available at

<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/clinical-guidance-on-cannabis-for-medical-use.pdf>

Appendix 1 sets out the Expert Reference Group membership. A critical requirement for the successful establishment of the MCAP was meaningful engagement with representative bodies, prescribing clinicians, patients, and pharmacists. All are considered integral to the development of operational clinical guidance, and it is intended to follow this process as part of the 2026 Review.

Yours sincerely,



Robert Watt

Secretary General

Appendix 1 – Expert Reference Group Membership

Reference Group Member	Representing
Dr Mairín Ryan	HIQA and Chairperson
Dr Seamus O'Reilly	RCPI - Medical Oncologist
Professor Tony O'Brien	RCPI – Consultant physician in palliative medicine
Dr Peter Widdess-Walsh	RCPI – Consultant Neurologist
Dr Chris McGuigan	RCPI - Consultant Neurologist
Dr Bryan Lynch	RCPI – Paediatric Neurologist
Dr Mike Scully	Consultant Psychiatrist – College of Psychiatrists
Dr Brendan Conroy	Pain Specialist & Anaesthetist - The College of Anaesthetists of Ireland
Dr Des Crowley	General Practitioner - Irish College of General Practitioners
Dr Cora Nestor	Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland
Keith O'Hourihane	Pharmacist - Community Pharmacy representative
Professor David Smith	Ethicist - Royal College of Surgeons Ireland
Joan Jordan	Patient representative - European Patients Academy on Therapeutic Innovation
Aileen Tierney	Patient representative
Elaine Breslin	Health Products Regulatory Authority
Dr Patricia Harrington	HIQA
Eugene Lennon	Principal Officer, Department of Health
Maria Egan	Pharmacist - Department of Health
Vanessa Lyons	Health Products Regulatory Authority
Niamh O'Rourke	National Clinical Effectiveness Committee, Department of Health
Eamonn Quinn	Pharmacist - Department of Health
Claudine Hughes	Chief Pharmacist - National Medicines Information Service