The Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
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It's Been Legal for 8 Years: Stop the Hate and Fear

Dear Prime Minister,

This week is Medical Cannabis Awareness Week, and we are asking you to stand with prescribed medical cannabis patients across the United Kingdom.

Medical cannabis became legal to prescribe on 1 November 2018. Eight years later, legality has still not delivered equality, understanding or meaningful access. Medical Cannabis Awareness Week exists because patients continue to have to explain, defend and fight for recognition of their medicine.

Patients are still treated with criminality for taking medication prescribed by specialist clinicians. They are challenged at work, questioned in public, denied access to pubs, venues and community spaces, separated from their medication and repeatedly forced to prove that they are patients, not criminals. The discrimination reaches into every part of life.

Patients face workplace drug-testing and zero-tolerance policies that may fail to distinguish prescribed treatment from illicit use. Some fear complaints, eviction or homelessness because landlords and housing providers misunderstand their medication. Others are refused entry to pubs, social clubs, entertainment venues, sporting events and the very community spaces that should protect people from loneliness and isolation.

They face uncertainty while driving, travelling and interacting with the police. They encounter misunderstanding within hospitals, care homes and other health and social-care settings. Some are unable to administer their prescribed treatment or find that lawful medication is viewed as a behavioural, safeguarding or illicit-drug concern rather than part of their healthcare.

For people who rely on adult social care, the consequences can be especially profound. They may depend on carers, supported accommodation, residential services or local authorities to respect and facilitate their prescribed treatment. Poor understanding can interfere not only with medication, but with a person's autonomy, dignity, independence and ability to remain connected to their community.

You have spoken powerfully about creating a social-care system founded on dignity, security and support. You have also emphasised the importance of listening to lived experience and bringing government departments together rather than allowing people to be passed around a fragmented system.

Medical cannabis patients need those same principles applied to them.

Too many people who might benefit from treatment remain unable to access it through the NHS. They must pay privately or go without. This creates a cruel divide between those who can afford lawful treatment and those who cannot, while patients already prescribed privately may find that other parts of the health and care system do not understand or properly recognise their prescriptions.

Behind every failure is a person. A worker afraid to disclose their prescription. A tenant frightened that misunderstanding could cost them their home. A social-care user whose treatment is questioned or disrupted by those responsible for supporting them. A patient turned away from a pub, social club or community venue and cut off from ordinary social life. A driver anxious that lawful medication may be misunderstood at the roadside. A disabled football supporter uncertain whether they will be admitted with their medicine. A family paying privately because meaningful NHS access remains beyond reach. A patient who has followed the law but is still made to feel ashamed.

You recently argued that it was unfair for football supporters to be singled out and prevented from consuming alcohol in sight of the pitch when supporters of other sports are treated differently. You called for outdated assumptions to be reconsidered and described the unequal treatment of football supporters as discriminatory.

We urge you to apply that same principle of fairness to patients.

Alcohol is a recreational product. Medical cannabis is prescribed medication.

If football supporters' ability to drink alcohol deserves national debate, disabled patients being denied entry, prevented from carrying medication or forced to choose between treatment and participation demands attention too.

The same principle applies to pubs and community spaces. These are not merely commercial venues. They are places where friendships are maintained, loneliness is reduced and communities come together. A patient should not be excluded from them because staff or security do not understand a lawful prescription.

Nor should a person's medication contribute to housing insecurity or homelessness. Nobody should fear losing their accommodation because a landlord, housing officer or support provider mistakes prescribed treatment for illicit drug use.

These are not separate problems. They are connected expressions of the same failure to recognise patients as patients.

The person challenged at a football turnstile may already have faced discrimination from an employer, landlord, police officer, healthcare professional, social-care provider or pub door staff. Patients should not have to renegotiate the legitimacy of their medication in every workplace, home, hospital, care setting, stadium and community space they enter.

The consequences are emotional as well as practical. People withdraw from employment, healthcare, and community life. Some alter or interrupt their treatment because they fear confrontation. Others experience financial hardship, housing insecurity, worsening health, damaged relationships and profound isolation.

Enough is enough. It's Been Legal for 8 Years: Stop the Hate and Fear. We are urging you to:

1. Publicly recognise medical cannabis patients as patients, acknowledging the stigma, exclusion, financial pressure and institutional barriers they continue to face.
2. Meet medical cannabis patient groups and people with direct lived experience, including patients affected by barriers in employment, housing, homelessness services, social care, healthcare, driving, policing, sport, pubs and community life.
3. Ensure medical cannabis is considered within your social-care reforms and the wider conversation about care, including patient autonomy, medication support, safeguarding,

workforce training and discrimination in care homes, supported accommodation and community services.

4. Commit to a timely and transparent government response to the forthcoming ACMD review of cannabis-based products for medicinal use, with patients and patient-led organisations meaningfully involved in considering its findings and shaping the next steps.
5. Ensure that the government's response looks beyond clinical access and drug policy to the wider experiences of patients, including discrimination and exclusion in employment, housing and homelessness services, health and social care, driving and policing, football and sport, pubs, hospitality and community spaces.
6. Ask relevant departments, public bodies and sector organisations to review their policies, guidance and training, ensuring that prescribed medication is distinguished from illicit drug use and that patients are treated fairly, safely and with dignity.
7. Identify a minister with responsibility for coordinating action across these connected areas, so that patients are not passed endlessly between departments and the wider equality issues do not fall outside the scope of the ACMD review.
8. Publish a coordinated action plan with named responsibilities and timescales, developed in meaningful partnership with patients and patient-led organisations.

We are urging you to recognise a national problem, listen to those affected and provide the leadership needed to prevent patients being passed endlessly between departments, regulators and institutions.

Your approach to social care recognises that government cannot continue leaving difficult problems unresolved while vulnerable people pay the price. You have said that people deserve a system that gives them dignity, security and support when they need it most.

Medical cannabis patients are asking for no less.

The change in law in 2018 offered hope. For too many, that hope has been followed by eight years of expense, anxiety, exclusion and fear.

Legalisation should have meant that patients could use their prescribed medicine without being treated as criminals. It should have encouraged informed healthcare, compassionate social care, fair workplace and housing policies, consistent policing and equal access to football, pubs and community life. It should have opened doors, not left patients standing outside them.

We are using Medical Cannabis Awareness Week to urge you to send a clear message:

Patients are not criminals. Prescribed medicine should be treated as medicine. Nobody should face hatred, homelessness, humiliation or exclusion because of their treatment.

After eight years, patients should no longer have to fight separately for recognition in every workplace, home, care setting, hospital, police encounter, pub, stadium and public space.

It is time to replace stigma with understanding, fragmentation with leadership, and exclusion with equality.

Eight Years: Stop the Hate and Fear

We would welcome a meeting and the opportunity to work constructively with your government on a fairer future for every patient.

Yours sincerely,

PatientsCann UK®

Plus the individual patient groups, patients, carers and supporters who have signed below.

Cc: Secretary of State for Health and Social Care; Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport; Home Secretary; Secretary of State for Transport; Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government; Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade; Minister for Women and Equalities; Minister of State for Social Security and Disability; Disability Unit; Equality and Human Rights Commission