

**THE MEDICINAL
CANNABIS
QUESTIONS
YOU REALLY
WANT TO ASK!**

HELIUS

**CHILL
DIVISION**

QUESTIONS FOR THE INDUSTRY

Q. Why is medicinal cannabis so expensive?

Current medicinal cannabis dried flower products are roughly the same price as many underground prices. If you're used to buying small amounts then your prescription may even be a fair bit cheaper. Shop around though because some unscrupulous dispensaries know that pricing is not usually public and so they add significant markup (more than the manufacturer in some cases) whereas other pharmacies won't.

Q. What qualifications do I need to have to work in the legal profession?

There are no mandatory qualification requirements, and this will vary depending on what you want to do. There are a huge variety of possible jobs, from cultivators to extraction operators, R&D and so much more.

Q. Can people with prior convictions still work in the industry?

Yes, you can even be a named person on a Medicinal Cannabis license with the Medicinal Cannabis Agency. If you're working for someone else, they'll need to know before you start, but as long as they know about your priors (most require a police check when you apply), then it's not legally speaking a deal-breaker.

Q. How do I get a license?

You'll need to pay an up-front fee to the Medicinal Cannabis Agency, as well as a cheap annual renewal fee. They'll want to review your SOPs and security arrangements before granting the license but it's definitely achievable if you want.

Q. How much of a cut does the Government get from this all?

The Govt charges a cheap annual fee per-license, which is only a few grand for cultivation. Other than that, they basically get nothing but GST. They don't get a per-gram or per-bottle cut of anything at all.

Q. Why is there no product information or even a mention of 'cannabis' on your website?

Advertising restrictions prevent it because cannabis is largely an 'unapproved' medicine despite meeting Minimum Quality Standards (NZ MQS). There are incredibly strict rules around what can or cannot be posted online, shared, or even be displayed on a website. This includes product pricing / availability

If someone approaches a license holder, in private, and requests information (such as pricing or cannabinoid breakdowns), then it can be provided to them. It cannot be provided, even in private, unless it was specifically requested by the receiving party, otherwise it constitutes advertising and is illegal.

Q. Why don't you talk about the merits of cannabis on your website and how it can help?

Similar to why there's no product information, Medsafe enforces very strict requirements around unsubstantiated claims, especially when controlled drugs are involved. Companies cannot even repeat claims such as 'Sandy says it helps her back pain'.

Q. Can you say 'cannabis', 'weed' or 'marijuana' when talking about your products?

Yes, this is permitted, however the Best Practice Advocacy Centre (BPAC) recommends that the terms 'marijuana', 'dope', 'weed', 'pot' etc are not used due to their negative historical connotations, and instead that 'cannabis' is preferred as being the scientifically accurate term of the plant.

Q. Can I come on a tour of your growroom?

Usually not, unfortunately. Every time a human goes through, it's a potential liability and a method for introduction of diseases such as Tobacco Mosaic Virus, Hop Latent Viroid, or even just pollen. All of those can be devastating for a medicinal cannabis cultivator, and so most companies will try to limit their exposure to this. However there is nothing in the regulations preventing members of the public from being 'given a tour'.

Q. Can I come work for you?

We have no jobs going ourselves at the moment, however keeping an eye on LinkedIn is where most medicinally licensed companies post their jobs. Similarly, if you are interested in starting your own cultivation business, we're happy to assist you with getting through the licensing process, with your SOPs, security arrangements, offtake agreements and more.

Q. Can I help you test your product, or can you give away samples?

Heh, we've never had that asked before. Unfortunately, as a controlled substance, every gram must be accounted for. Sadly, even internal 'staff tests' are prohibited.

Q. Do you support legalization / decrim?

Yes, but that's largely irrelevant. Although we advocate for positive legislative changes that will remove the negative stigma, unjust prosecution, and focus on patient availability / accessibility, we have to adhere to the current regulations. If we like them or not doesn't matter, we need to play by the rules to keep our license.

Q. Isn't big pharma just trying to stop cannabis?

On the contrary, most companies in New Zealand are internally funded by their Kiwi shareholders, and only 3 companies are publicly traded. Legislation was drafted with feedback from local companies, with the push for strictest standards coming from those that had a lot of funding from their local communities prior to going public. Local companies that had consultation from international experts pushed for more relaxed standards in line with other well functioning regulatory environments.

Q. Doesn't the Govt just want me to take pills?

The Medicinal Cannabis Scheme implementation showed they were open to the therapeutic benefits of cannabis, but unfortunately the quick implementation wasn't without pitfalls.

Almost everyone involved in the industry, from patients to cultivators, would suggest that there are changes

needed to improve the situation for all. This is coming, in due course.

QUESTIONS ABOUT MEDICATION

Q. Is this legal?

Cannabis is legal when obtained through a Doctors prescription. This includes all the legal dosage forms in NZ including dried flower for inhalation. Any doctor in NZ can prescribe cannabis for any condition to any patient. Specialist cannabis doctors may be better at prescribing it due to the fact it's so 'new' for so many doctors, and because there's no mandatory upskill / training requirement.

Q. Is there an age limit?

There is no age limit at all for Medicinal Cannabis, though the BPAC recommends 18+, or anyone under the age of 18 gets a specialist to prescribe for them (such as for epilepsy etc)

Q. Will I get high from medicinal cannabis?

Not specifically, certainly not from CBD. CBD is considered non-psychoactive.

Depending on the consumption method and the levels of THC, you may also not. The level of consumption to 'feel stoned' varies from person to person, which is also why a lot of GPs will 'start small and raise the amounts taken' to manage symptoms. CBD can counteract the effects of THC so if you are taking a product that has balanced levels of both, you may not feel any psychoactive effect at all.

Q. How do I know if cannabis is right for me?

Speaking with a qualified prescriber is a good start. Most GPs are unfortunately still unaware of the changes in legislation that permits its prescription, let alone all the symptoms it can treat.

Cannabis has been used to treat a variety of symptoms from migraines, insomnia, lack of appetite, stomach / period cramps, nerve-pain, muscle pain, & so much more.

Q. What should I take for my symptoms?

Great question, and that will vary for a lot of people. For some pain / cramps, CBD products will be sufficient. For nerve-related pain, for some insomnia sufferers etc they may need THC extract or possibly even dried flower. If you've tried one thing and it hasn't worked, or hasn't worked as well as you'd like, talk with your GP because they may offer a different method of consumption, a stronger dose, or a different type of product entirely. Be honest with them about effects vs expectations and they'll do their best to help. It can take a few weeks for the full effects of cannabis to really take hold, especially if you are using extracts. Start 'low and go slow' is what most Doctors will advise, and you can titrate up the level that is effective for you personally.

Q. Can I just vape the oil?

No, absolutely not! The way that MCT is absorbed by the lungs is incredibly bad for you! If you're vaping, vape dried-flower products, or (eventually when they're available) specifically formulated extracts / concentrates. Your CBD or THC extract products should NEVER ever be vaped.

Q. I'm allergic to MCT oil, where can I get a product with coconut as a carrier-oil?

All medicinal cannabis oils that are verified as meeting the NZ MQS currently use MCT oil as the carrier. This is due to inheriting limitations from the European Pharmacopoeia when the legislation was written. CBD Products that use other carrier oils do not meet the NZ MQS standards.

THC does not have that same set of relaxed rules due to it being a Controlled Drug C1 so currently is only available using MCT as the carrier oil.

Q. Can I take medication with me on domestic / international flights?

Yes, you can, though the limitations around it being check-in luggage vs carry on will vary depending on if it's an oil or not and how much.

You'll need to declare it when going through customs

so if you're headed anywhere other than Australia they may still confiscate it even with a prescription. Always check with the laws in the country you are traveling to.

Q. Why doesn't my doctor know about medicinal cannabis?

We'd love to help your GP, and we know that other companies are similarly offering information. However that information has to be requested by the GP, companies and license holders are not permitted under the Medicines Act 1981 to advertise. This includes proactively approaching doctors to help them with medicinal cannabis information, unless they approach a company, in private, first of all. Even contacting a GP to offer generic information about medicinal cannabis, which is classed as an unapproved medicine, is potentially the kind of thing that a company could get in trouble for or face fines.

It's not all bad news though, as despite there being no need for doctors to upskill on this 'new' (old) medicine, there have already been the likes of the Best Practice Advocacy Centre (BPAC) who have created some resources for GPs, Nurses, Pharmacists etc, just search for 'BPAC Cannabis'. There is also a great info hub www.MCInfo.com which has a lot of base information about cannabis based medicines.

Q. Why is the flower I get prescribed not as good as what I can get from the street?

This has been something we've heard a lot, especially from connoisseur consumers. We have some of the strictest rules in the world for medicinal cannabis, and these are some of the reasons those rules cause sub-standard flower:

- 1 Microbial counts have a limit of 200CFU/g (Colony Forming Units of bacteria), which means gamma irradiation may be used in order to meet those requirements.
- 2 Loss on Drying (LOD) requires no more than 10% weight is lost. This means cannabis needs to be at around 47-49% humidity (approx), as opposed to the 'gold standard' of 62% for cannabis, resulting in a 'crispy dry' product. Terpenes also break down rapidly under 55%, irreversibly.

This overly dry flower can also cause inhalation issues for patients (coughing fits etc), and as such we have petitioned to Medsafe to have them amended to meet ASTM D8196 & ASTM D8197 standards which are medicinal cannabis-specific. Those standards would provide far superior products for patients and arguably even greater safety despite the limits being relaxed.

Q. Does that mean medicinal cannabis is moldy? Aren't some companies using 'as a tea' to get around moldy products?

Not at all, far from it. However these limits are set so extreme under the European Pharmacopoeia (to ensure patient safety) that it can compromise quality.

To give you a comparative example, a typical 'indoor home grow' of cannabis will likely have a count of 20,000 -> 200,000 CFU/g of bacteria. Outdoors grows have 2,000,000 CFU/g to 5,000,000 CFU/g.

With those numbers in mind, when you see that inhalation through vaping is only permitted to reach 200CFU/g, it gives you an example of the highly sterile environments required to make these medicines.

As such, even though they're cultivated in highly purified environments, they may still exceed 200CFU/g which can only be cleansed with irradiation (Gamma, e-beam etc).

So rather than gamma irradiate cannabis flower products, some importers have opted to classify it as 'for tea' consumption, which has a higher microbial limit.

Q. What if my GP won't prescribe me cannabis?

Talk with a cannabis friendly specialist or clinic, often times they can do an online or phone-based consultation for you. If you talk with them and ask them to write you a "Clinical Letter" that you can give to your regular GP, many doctors will be OK with continuing to prescribe repeat-prescriptions if provided with a Clinical Letter.

QUESTIONS ABOUT LEGISLATION

Q. Are there limits on THC?

In short, no, there are no potency limits or requirements. Certain licence holders are only permitted to cultivate low-THC (Usually high CBD) cultivars, such as in lower security facilities or when cultivated outdoors. To cultivate higher THC you need a much higher security facility.

However for medicines there is no minimum or maximum, and any kind of cultivar could become the next medicine. Similarly there are no 'caps' on how much is reasonably consumed by a patient, though there are other things your GP will consider if you go through a few grams per-day.

Q. Can I drive after taking medicinal cannabis?

Yes, this is permitted. However driving while impaired is not, regardless of if you have a prescription or not.

You'll want to either keep your original bottle /jar / bag in the car, your prescription (matching your name), or a photo of it clearly showing the label with your name etc

Q. Can I vape in public?

Yes, just like you can with a nicotine or flavor-based vape. Use your better judgment around where you do / don't do it, blowing smoke (vapor) in someones face is likely to be a really bad idea, but you can still medicate while out and about!

Q. What if my job asks me to take a urine test?

Always have your prescription with you.

It will be up to your employer as to how they view this. Many companies do not yet have policies about medicinal cannabis, so it is worth asking the appropriate department (Such as HR) how this could be dealt with.

Keep a record of discussions while you're figuring things out with them in case you need to refer back to communications down the line.

It is probably a good idea to get a letter from your Dr/ Clinic to have on hand also regarding the products that have been prescribed.

QUESTIONS ABOUT CULTIVATION

Q. Can I get a license to grow at home?

Not at home, however you can in commercial / industrial areas with the right amount of 'barriers to entry' and other security measures in place.

Q. Can't sovereign citizens grow at home?

No, clicking your heels three times doesn't make you immune to the law. If the correct licenses are obtained though anyone can cultivate medicinal cannabis.

Q. Can I grow outdoors?

Yes, though you'll need to have someone who's offered you an offtake agreement before you'll be given a license by the Medicinal Cannabis Agency. Even then, it'll only be for CBD flower (low / noTHC) so the price-per-gram will be very low.

Q. What's an offtake agreement?

An Offtake Agreement is where a buyer will write a letter stating that they'll effectively buy all that you can grow, provided it meets certain quality requirements, up to X kg per month / quarter.

The buyer must also be licensed to handle/process medicinal cannabis, you can't just get your mate to write you a letter.

Q. Will you give me an offtake agreement?

Sorry, we can't buy your ghost weed bro. It's one of the most difficult parts to break into an industry, a real chicken and egg problem, which is why we include that offtake with our SOPs if you want to get a facility setup through us. Sadly, cool instagram photos aren't enough to know if a business will be viable or not. A company like Helius can potentially provide an offtake agreement, but it doesn't happen without a lot of planning and working together to understand cultivars, specifications, volumes, test grows, licensing, testing, COAS, drying, storage, transport, insurance and the list goes on. Everything grown outdoors currently will be suitable only for extraction.

Q. Will you buy my genetics?

Maybe! Quality genetics, free of bugs, TMV, HLVd, that yield well with high potency are always of interest to cultivators. Put a proposal together.

Q. What sort of light / nutrient levels do you run in your facility at Chill Division?

Currently we run Athena nutrients at 3.0EC from cloning to vege to harvest. pH level varies.

We start plants off under 150-200 μ Mol/s of light at clone, 400 μ Mol/s at vege start, 1000-1200 μ Mol/s at the end of vege, and have reached 2500+ μ Mol/s by the end of 3rd week of flowering, though we're still working on refining that further.

CO2 is at 1200-1500ppm at every step of the way, and we control temperature and humidity to maintain tight VPD levels (within 0.05) across the whole grow.

Q. Can I do living soil if I get a license?

Sure you can, though hydroponics / rockwool is going to be 'cleaner' and give you lower microbial growth levels. There is no requirement for this either way though, be it indoors or outdoors, in the legislation.

WHY CAN'T YOU ... ?

Although Medicinal cannabis products in NZ have been through verification by the Medicinal Cannabis Agency to make sure they meet rigorous quality and manufacturing standards, they are classified as Unapproved Medicines and are subject to rules under the Medicines Act 1981.

Medsafe is extremely clear: Unapproved medicines cannot be advertised.

What is advertising you ask? Medsafe is also extremely clear on this:

- Publishing the availability, or future availability, of an unapproved medicine is advertising. This includes publication in newspapers, on websites, in social media, on TV or radio, in presentations and by word of mouth.
- Availability of an unapproved medicine cannot be indicated in any way to anyone. A healthcare professional may request information. A supplier can not suggest that healthcare professionals contact them about unapproved medicines.
- Advertising covers both public and private communications and applies to communications to members of the public and to health care professionals.
- Personal representation is advertising. For example, product representatives visiting health care professionals to promote an unapproved medicine is advertising.
- Prospective supply of price lists is advertising. For example, if a price list is supplied unsolicited or placed on a website, Medsafe considers this to be advertising. This is advertising the availability of an unapproved medicine.

So we can not:

- Publish availability of medicines, eg "We have these drops / oils coming soon"
- Publish pricing information, eg "Dank bud is \$420/oz"
- Make any medical claims or imply any benefits; eg "This may help with insomnia"
- Market products or accessories through radio, television, public websites, billboards, product labels, letterbox leaflets, testimonials or social media posts
- Repeat unsubstantiated claims other individuals or companies have made
- Make claims about how certain aspects of the plant may provide benefits, eg "The roots are great for making balms for arthritis"
- Provide information that has not been requested by an individual, eg email lists
- Provide product to anyone through a compassionate program : this is not legal with unapproved medicines.
- Put representatives out on the road to help educate Doctors
- Imply that the product cannot harm a person, or that it is not habit-forming. This includes additional medical devices, such as vapes
- Provide samples to Dr's or patients (and definitely not staff)

We'd love to be able to, but often the reason something is or is not happening is due to compliance. Our hands are often tied. The regulations are intentionally broad to basically catch everything. This is intended to apply to everyone, not just Medicinal Cannabis licence holders, however it seems unlikely that Medsafe would pursue individual members of the public.

These rules are tough, we're aware. We didn't make them, we just have to abide by them. If we don't abide by them, our licences get revoked and we are out of business.

NZ patients will not be well served if there are no local manufacturers.

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If you would like to be a guest please email us on

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