

Medication, pharmaceuticals and medicinal cannabis

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Introduction

Comcare can pay for the appropriate cost of medications prescribed by a legally qualified medical practitioner (LQMP) or dentist for the treatment of an injured employee's compensable condition.

For further guidance on Comcare's approach to medication and pharmaceuticals see Comcare's [Pharmacy Policy](#). This policy mandates the safe prescribing of medicines, especially those that can be misused, such as benzodiazepines and opiates and aims to ensure costs are appropriate, sets out the maximum medication mark up and dispensing costs payable by Comcare.

The Clinical Panel reviews pharmacy invoices. [The Clinical Panel Pharmacy Process FAQ](#) provides you with more information about the process

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Medicinal cannabis

Medicinal cannabis is a new or emerging treatment with limited clinical evidence.

All requests for medicinal cannabis must be referred to the Clinical Panel for review, to assist with appropriate and consistent decision making. For further guidance see the page [Clinical panel review](#) (note: when reviewing requests for medicinal cannabis, the Clinical Panel applies the [guidance recommended by the Department of Health and Therapeutic Goods Administration](#)).

Information gathering

Given medicinal cannabis is a new or emerging treatment with limited clinical evidence, it is important that Comcare has sufficient information to make an informed decision. Prior to sending a request for medicinal cannabis to the Clinical Panel for review, you should review the information accompanying the request. The following list of questions has been developed to assist you to review the information provided, and to seek additional information if needed.

Questions to ask the prescribing Treating Health Practitioner (THP):

1. What type of medicinal cannabis is being prescribed (tetrahydrocannabinidiol or THC, cannabidiol or CBD, or both types) and in what proportions (any medicinal cannabis prescribed above 4% THC may also require a S8 permit depending on the state in Australia).
2. What is the name of the product, and dose to be prescribed.
3. To provide a copy of their authorized prescriber letter from TGA or SAS Category B permit(s) [Special Access Scheme \(SAS\) permit](#).
4. If the medicinal cannabis is being compounded – what is the clinical rationale for why it is needing to be compounded noting that there are over 37 off the shelf products of varying dosages currently available.
5. What is the clinical indication for the medicinal cannabis: non cancer chronic pain or other indication such as for a psychological condition.
6. THP should be asked if they are prescribing a form of medicinal cannabis containing THC whether they have not only provided general written information but specifically advised the patient they are NOT allowed to drive.
7. Clearly state what outcome measures will be conducted PRIOR to starting the Employee on medicinal cannabis and how often they will be repeated whilst prescribing medicinal cannabis to their patient. They must also agree to provide copies of those measures to Comcare for review.
8. What are the current analgesic (or psychiatric if relevant to request) medications including dose and frequency. If the medicinal cannabis is found to be beneficial as assessed on outcome measures, what is the plan for changing these medications in the future.
9. What other analgesic medications (or psychiatric medications) have been tried previously and what was the outcome.
10. Whether the Employee has a past or family history of psychosis.
11. Has the Employee had previous “at risk” behaviours for drug dependence or substance abuse disorders or is considered “at risk” of such behaviours currently or in the future (note: in some states a S8 permit is not required to be obtained by the THP if the Employee is considered not “at risk” by the THP. If the Employee has a past history of “at risk” behaviours, however, most pain and addiction medicine specialists consider that a S8 permit should be obtained).

Optional questions if needed:

1. For psychological condition:
 - a. The THP needs to provide a clinical rationale for their treatment choice.
 - b. A written copy of a second opinion should be provided. The Phoenix Australia 2020/21 annual report noted a lack of evidence currently to support the use of medicinal cannabis for psychological conditions and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) Guidelines, indicate that a second opinion be sought from another psychiatrist to support the prescribing of medicinal cannabis.
 - c. What recent evidence-based level 1 or 2 studies can be provided to support the prescribing of medicinal cannabis for a psychological condition.
2. If medicinal cannabis has already been prescribed:
 - a. When was the starting date, dosage and frequency.
 - b. If any changes in the type of medicinal cannabis were made, then what and when where those changes made.
 - c. Outcome measures should still be sought as per the questions above, including initial baseline measures and any subsequent review measures.

Please note: If you require assistance with reviewing information accompanying the medicinal cannabis request, or with seeking additional information from the THP, contact your Injury Manager or a member of the Clinical Panel team.

Side effects of medicinal cannabis

The extent of side effects can vary with the type of medicinal cannabis product and between individuals. If an employee reports that they are experiencing a side effect(s), you should advise the employee to seek advice from their medical

Assessing claims for medicinal cannabis

In addition to the normal process for assessing medical treatment requests here, [Determining liability for medical treatment](#), to assess a claim for medicinal cannabis, follow the steps below:

Step 1: Assess the evidence provided

Assess the evidence provided by the medical practitioner and decide if any additional evidence is required to support the claim for medicinal cannabis. To be comprehensive the evidence should include answers to all of the questions detailed above in the section titled [Questions to ask the prescribing Treating Health Practitioner \(THP\)](#).

Please note: The questions detailed above must be chosen and modified for the circumstances of the individual employee, and information already provided, prior to sending to the THP. If yes, Comcare has received adequate information, seek review by the Clinical Panel (Step 2).

If no, request additional/missing information such as outlined above.

Step 2: Refer proposal to the Clinical Panel

Refer the material provided by the THP to the Clinical Panel for their consideration and recommended actions (note: when reviewing requests for medicinal cannabis, the Clinical Panel applies the TGA [guidance](#). For further guidance refer to the [\(Undertaking a clinical panel review page\)](#)

The Clinical Panel will advise the claim manager of their recommendation via the 'Create Clinical Panel Review' (CCPR) function in Pracsys. In the CCPR function, the Clinical Panel will attach the CPR form as an electronic document which automatically creates a diary to alert the CM to review and action the recommendation.

Step 3: Action recommendation from the Clinical Panel review

If the claim for medicinal cannabis is supported, you should approve a trial period in line with the Clinical Panel Consultant recommendations –usually three-months.

You should create an action diary in Pracsys for the end date of the scheduled trial to obtain outcome measures from the medical practitioner.

If the claim for medicinal cannabis is not supported, you should draft a determination to reject the claim as per the usual process.

Step 4: Obtain the outcome measures following the trial period

Once you receive the outcome measures following the trial period, you should refer them and any other material to the Clinical Panel to review trial outcome and develop a long-term strategy.

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