

Cannabis referendum conversation pack



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For more help with your conversations see:

- › [Government summary of the Cannabis Legalisation and Control Bill](#)
- › [“Cannabis referendum – explained”](#)

If your conversation goes well...

- › Make sure your talking partner is enrolled to vote. If not, point them to <https://vote.nz/enrolling/>
- › Make sure they vote on election day.
- › Encourage them to have conversations with their friends and whānau too.

Using conversations to win the cannabis referendum

#HEALTH
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It might feel hard to start a conversation about cannabis but it's really important.

To win the referendum, we need everyone to jump on board and start having casual conversations with their friends, family and workmates. These conversations will help them understand why voting 'yes' and putting controls around cannabis is so important.

Conversations are a really important campaigning tool - in the Irish abortion referendum, 39% of voters thought discussions (online and in person) with family, friends or workmates were the most influential factor in the final outcome. We've come up with a few tips to help you get the most out of your conversations.

You can start a conversation by

- › **Keeping it light.** "I was just thinking about the cannabis referendum yesterday...", "Are you voting in the cannabis referendum?"
- › **Using a personal story.** "You know how Bob got that cannabis conviction when he was younger... do you think it made his life much harder?"
- › **Introducing a prompt.** Show them an article and ask what they think or sit down and watch the "[Cannabis referendum – explained](#)" video together

Then the rest of the conversation should flow easily

Ask questions first, be genuine and explore ideas together instead of debating the topic. It's important to understand where they're coming from before you try and change their mind. E.g. "What makes you think that?", or "What do you think we should be trying to achieve in the way we manage cannabis use in Aotearoa"

Focus on shared values first to connect and keep building common ground. Values, such as health and compassion, are fundamental to everyone, so they are a compelling way to start the conversation. Focusing on values activates emotions, helps people connect and be more open to new ideas. E.g. "Health is important to me too. And from what I have learned...". "I want young people to be protected as well, that's why I think legalising cannabis is such a good idea..."

Share your own journey and experiences. Personal conversations will help ground the discussion. E.g. "I used to think that... but when I looked into it further I found...", "When I used cannabis... I think that having more controls in place would have..."

Don't get into a fact-slanging match - that kind of conversation often makes people just believe even more strongly in what they thought before. Instead, use facts to help ground ideas. Facts are not always as convincing as you might hope, especially in this "fake news" era. First lead with values, then use facts and evidence to reinforce an idea. The [Messages to Amplify](#) and [FAQs](#) resources will be really helpful here.

Don't push too hard. This can be a tough topic for some people. Give them time to think about what you've said and you can easily pick it up again later.

Don't be afraid to say "I'll come back to you on that one" if you don't know an answer. You can have another chat later when you have found out the answer or send them resources to read. Come to our [Facebook group](#) and ask for advice from other people who have had these conversations too.

Stay on message. We have tested the messages that work best to help persuade people to vote yes. Check them out in [Messages to Amplify](#)

Messages to Amplify

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We have tested the messages that work best to help people understand why it's important to vote 'Yes' at the referendum. These won't necessarily be the same messages you think are important, but they're the ones that are most convincing to the middle voters who might swing either way at the referendum.

More people are convinced by understanding a vision or a statement of values than they are by facts and figures. So it's a good idea to start your statement with a concrete vision, explaining why we're not currently there, and posing a solution. **All while keeping statements as positive as possible** 😊

Leading with facts and figures can reinforce an idea, but it doesn't do much to persuade, particularly in this age of "fake news." Leading with values, on the other hand, activates emotions and opens an audience's hearts and ears to the message. – [The Opportunity Agenda](#)

How to structure your messages

Values

Lead with shared values and the end goal that we all want, not problems. e.g. *We all want healthy and safe communities, where everyone who needs it can access help if they need it.*

Problem

What is stopping us achieving this vision? What happens as a result? Give evidence. Use concrete examples. e.g. *but too often that doesn't happen because health and education services are underfunded. As a result, around 50,000 people in New Zealand want help for their drug use but aren't getting it*

Solution

What will fix the problem? e.g. *Regulating cannabis will mean revenue from cannabis sales redistributed into health and education services that can benefit of all of us.*

Action

Give a specific action people can do to fix the issue. e.g. *A yes vote will help us protect our young people and look after those who are struggling with their cannabis use.*

The key messages to focus on

1. Tax will be redistributed to public health and education programmes

- › We all want healthy and safe communities, where everyone who needs it can access help if they need it.
- › But too often health and education services are overwhelmed and underfunded. As a result, around 50,000 people in New Zealand want help for their drug use but aren't getting it.
- › Regulating cannabis will mean as much as an \$490 million in annual tax, including a specific cannabis levy that will be redistributed into reducing cannabis harm, and cannabis education programs that can benefit of all of us.
- › Voting YES in the cannabis referendum will help us look after those who are struggling with their cannabis use.

For more info visit [On Our Terms](#)

2. Free up police time to focus on serious crime

- › We all want to live in safe communities where police can focus on serious crime.
- › Our drug laws currently focus on criminalising people for their drug use. As a result, the Police spend almost \$200 million and over 330,000 hours on cannabis enforcement and convictions per year.
- › Regulating cannabis will mean fewer lives ruined by convictions, and Police will have more time to focus on serious crime.
- › Voting YES in the cannabis referendum will mean safer communities and fewer wasted resources.

3. Improving access to patients

- › As a society we value compassion and we don't like to see people suffer for no reason.
- › Many patients rely on cannabis to deal with debilitating conditions, like seizures and chronic pain. While medicinal cannabis is now legal in New Zealand with a prescription, the scheme doesn't work for most patients. There are only a few products available and it is extremely expensive, costing some people hundreds every month. Because of this, patients are forced to use illicit products for their health needs, putting them at risk of a conviction.
- › A legal cannabis market will mean more affordable access to a wider range of products.
- › Voting YES in the cannabis referendum means patients will be able to access the products that work for them without fear of prosecution.

For more info see [why medical cannabis advocates back legalisation](#)

4. The Cannabis Legalisation Control Bill sets out strong public health controls over cannabis

- › We all want to live in a society where people are protected from the harms of cannabis.
- › But because of prohibition, the black market controls the cannabis supply. This means it's impossible to have any public health controls over cannabis.
- › If we regulate cannabis:
 - we can put controls over potency levels, and have plain packaging with clear warning labels, and zero advertising
 - Only people 20 and older will be able to purchase
 - It will only be available to purchase at licences premises
 - there will be no public consumption or cannabis
- › Voting YES in the cannabis referendum will help create healthy and safe communities, where there are public health controls over cannabis. It will show we care enough to put healthy rules around harmful substances, and that we want to help people make good decisions about their lives.

For more info see [the Government's summary of the Bill](#)

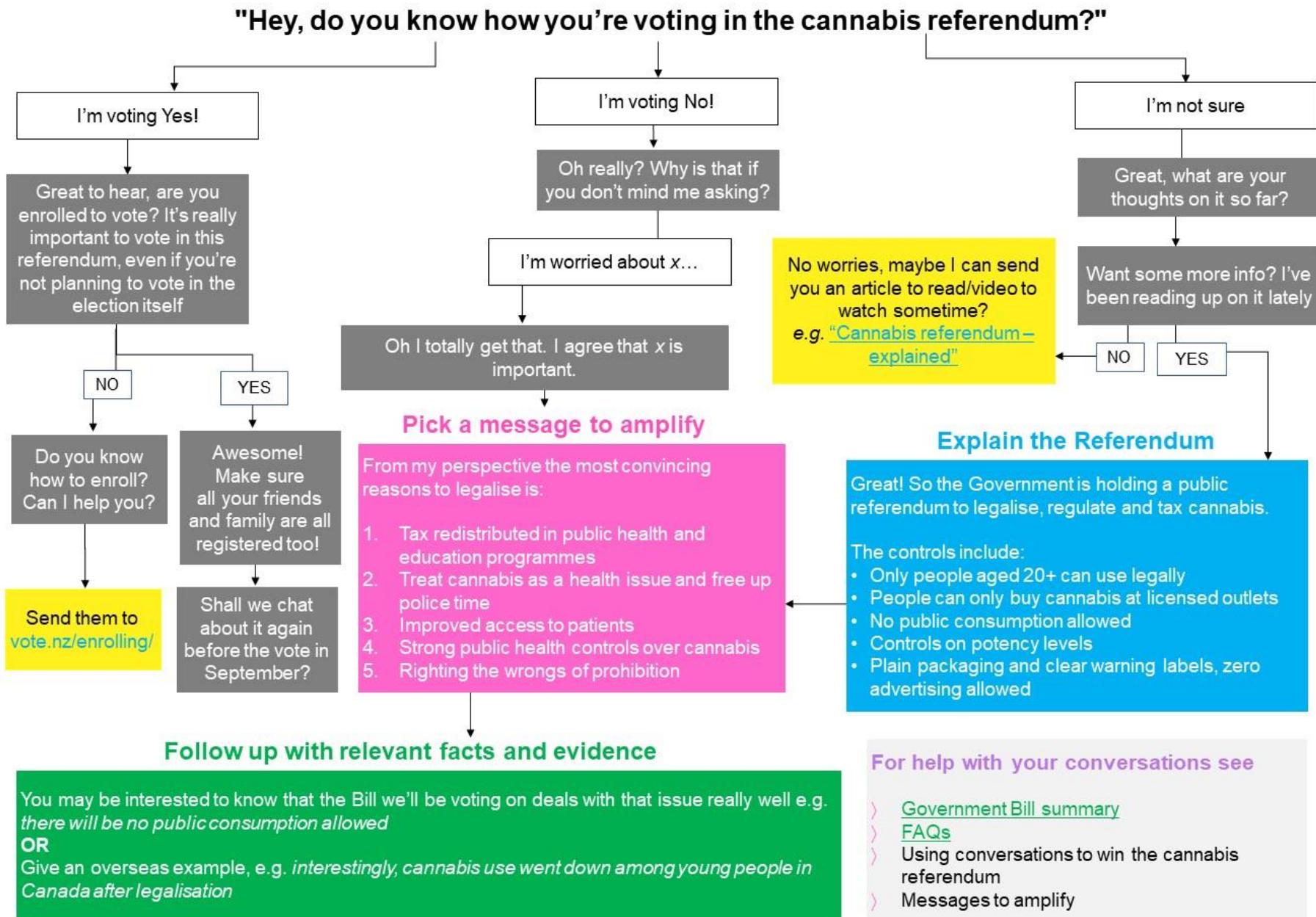
5. Righting the wrongs of prohibition

- › We all want to live in a fair and just society.
- › But under prohibition, some people are unfairly discriminated against, including young people and Māori. People under 30 make up 45% of people with a cannabis conviction, and Maori make up 41%.
- › Regulating cannabis will mean fewer young people and fewer Māori coming into contact with the criminal justice system and fewer trapped in endless cycles of reconviction.
- › Voting YES in the cannabis referendum will mean improvements in health, justice, and economic development, especially for young people and Māori.

For more info see [our article about how the Bill addresses social equity](#)

Cannabis conversation flow-chart

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Using digital engagement to win the cannabis referendum

#HEALTH
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Online interactions are different to real life - a little can go a long way. So let's use our collective power and make our time and energy count!

Conversations are a really important campaigning tool - in the Irish abortion referendum, 39% of voters thought discussions (online and in person) with family, friends or workmates were the most influential factor in the final outcome.

Below are some ideas on **how to get the most out of social media** by making our messages the first thing people read, spending time on people who are genuinely interested, and not wasting energy on trolls.

Set the tone, amplify our message, don't feed the trolls

We want our comments to be the first thing people read when they look at a post. Far more people read comments on social media than make comments themselves. Let's make this work for us.

Get in early and comment on social media posts (e.g. news articles, friend's posts). This helps set the right tone and makes it more likely other posts will follow in a similar fashion.

Spend your time posting, liking and commenting on posts and comments that are positive and align with our messaging. We can work the algorithm in our favour to boost our messages so they are the first thing others read.

Don't bother reacting to firm 'no' voters and negative comments. Any reaction (👍, 😞) or reply pushes negative comments up the thread for more to see. So pay them no mind and spend your energy amplifying content that aligns with our messaging. People who make negative comments on posts are very often seasoned 'no' campaigners whose specific aim is to waste your time and get a rise out of you.

Focus on people who sound 'persuadable' - listen, ask questions and be curious

Many people don't know which way to vote and are open to both sides of the argument. These people are well worth engaging with online. Many more people with the same views will read these comments so it's worth taking the time to engage positively and constructively.

Engage with people who are asking real questions or have noted genuine concerns, or are considering both sides of the argument.

Ask genuine questions instead of attacking their position, for example "What experiences make you think that?", "Have you considered....?"

Start with shared values and personal experience

Values and personal experiences are fundamental to everyone, so they are a compelling way to start the conversation. Talking about what connects us activates emotions and helps people be more open to new ideas.

Focus on shared values first to connect and keep building common ground. E.g. “Health is important to me too. And from what I have learned...”. “I want young people to be protected as well...”

Share your own journey and experiences. E.g. “I used to think that... but when I looked into it further I found...”, “When I used cannabis... I think that having more controls in place would have...”

Keep coming back to the message you’re trying to amplify. E.g. “I definitely hear what you are say, but....”, “That’s really interesting.... Have you considered...?”

Use facts wisely

Don’t get into a fact-slanging match - that kind of conversation often makes people just believe even more strongly in what they thought before. Instead, use facts to help ground ideas. Facts are not always as convincing as you might hope, especially in this “fake news” era. First lead with values, then use facts and evidence to reinforce an idea. The [Messages to amplify](#) and [FAQs](#) resources will be really helpful here.

Consider peoples’ feelings in the words you use

Don’t insult people or their thinking – just question the views themselves. Imagine you are chatting to a friend and their feelings are important to you. People reading your posts will take your opinions more seriously if you sound measured and compassionate. If people are using inflammatory language to argue online they are likely ‘trolls’ and not worth our time.

Take a break if you’re feeling overwhelmed

Engaging online with people can take an emotional toll – choose where you spend your energy. Focus on amplifying messages and content, rather than arguing with people. Coming up against people who have different views and are not open to engaging constructively can be very disheartening. Be aware that the person you are talking to online may be trying to get under your skin as a deliberate campaigning tactic. So try not to take it personally, and take a break for a few days if it all becomes too much.

Remember you have an [online support group](#) to turn to if you need to let off some steam!

Cannabis Referendum FAQs

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What will the referendum question be?

The Cannabis Legalisation and Control Bill details how the new cannabis law will look. Voters will be asked to vote yes or no to the question “*Do you support the proposed Cannabis Legalisation and Control Bill?*”

The Bill prioritises public health and safety, and introduces a government-licensed production and retail market. It sets limits on personal use and restricts sales to those over 20. If more than 50% of voters support the Bill at the referendum, it will be taken to Parliament and go through the normal processes to become law.

For more information on what exactly is in the Bill, see the [Government’s Bill summary](#) and [why the Drug Foundation supports a yes vote](#)

How dangerous is cannabis actually?

Most people who use cannabis do so without causing much or any damage to themselves. But a small proportion experience negative impacts, and in some cases these can be severe. Impacts can include anxiety, depression, memory loss and mood swings. Cannabis can affect brain development and increase the risk of psychosis and other mental illnesses.

In other words, cannabis can cause harm - so our laws need to focus on reducing that harm, not increasing it as they do now.

Tightening public health regulations give our best chance at reducing cannabis-related harms. The Cannabis Control Bill proposes regulating potency, packaging, pricing and portion size. Public education campaigns will influence how often and how much people use.

How many people in New Zealand use cannabis anyway?

Cannabis is the most commonly used illicit drug used in New Zealand. Fifteen percent of adults (that's 590,000 adults) used cannabis in the past year, and 8.5 percent, or 330,000 adults, smoke cannabis monthly or more. Use is higher in Māori, young people and those in more deprived neighbourhoods.

Will legalising adult use of cannabis lead to more people using cannabis? And what about young people?

We might see overall cannabis use go up slightly, especially in the early days. A year after Canada legalised cannabis, overall use is about the same as before legalisation. And in both Canada and US States which have legalised, cannabis use by young people has actually decreased.

The Cannabis Legalisation and Control Bill prioritises public health and safety and introduces a government-licensed production and retail market. Products will be clearly labelled, and potency will be regulated and controlled. There will be limits on personal use and sales will be restricted to those over 20. These regulations should mean harmful cannabis use will go down, especially over the longer term.

The Cannabis Legalisation and Control Bill encourages people to consume less often and consume less potent products. A levy will allocate funds for drug education and treatment, meaning those who are struggling with their use or are likely to run into problems down the track can get help.

Get more information from our fact sheet [Controlling cannabis will better protect young people](#)

What age will people be able to buy and use cannabis?

The Cannabis Control Bill restricts cannabis sales to people over 20. The Government chose that age because they are concerned that cannabis can affect brain development and is particularly risky for younger users. Setting the limit at 20 strikes a sensible balance between limiting consumption by young people and recognising the advantages of allowing them access to products that carry health warnings and potency controls.

Not many people are criminalised for cannabis, are they? Do we really need to change the law?

About 3,000 people receive a conviction for cannabis offences every year - and more than half of those are for low-level offences such as possession and use. The people convicted are mostly young, Māori, and male. And just one conviction has a major impact on someone's life and their opportunities to get a job, travel and access credit. Regulating cannabis means police resources can be directed to focus on more serious crime.

Legalising cannabis will mean improvements in health, justice and economic development for Māori.

Māori are targeted by Police more under our drug law and are 3 times more likely to get a cannabis conviction than non-Māori with the same level of cannabis use. Legalisation will mean fewer Māori encountering the criminal justice system and fewer trapped in endless cycles of reconviction.

Legalisation will also improve health outcomes. Māori are twice as likely as non-Māori to suffer a substance use disorder, but they find it hardest to access health and treatment services. The Cannabis Legalisation and Control Bill puts money from cannabis taxes into health and prevention programmes that will benefit Māori.

The Bill aims to actively promote Māori access to the financial benefits that a new regulated market will bring. This will be especially important in the regions in which cannabis is a common crop. Legalisation will bring new jobs and income.

The Bill allows every person to grow two cannabis plants at home, or four per household. Allowing small-scale home cultivation was an important issue for Māori during the drafting of the Bill. It is often used as rongoa, to treat a variety of medical conditions. The home cultivation provisions will allow people to continue this practise but without fear of the law.

What will adult use of legal cannabis mean for access by patients to medicinal cannabis?

While medicinal cannabis is now legal in New Zealand with a prescription, only a small number of products are available, and those available are very expensive. This means medicinal cannabis products are out of reach of most New Zealanders who need them, even those with life threatening or debilitating conditions.

Legal cannabis would mean easier access to a wider range of products and more affordable prices. Patients will be able to access the medicine that works for them without fear of prosecution.

See [why medical cannabis advocates back legalisation](#)

What about drug driving?

Drug driving will remain illegal. – but we expect Police to have better tools to police it.

It's not safe to drive after using cannabis. Thankfully, there's no evidence from overseas that driving after using cannabis will increase after legalisation. In Canada, the number of people reporting driving within 2 hours of using cannabis did not change following cannabis legalisation, and the percentage of passengers driving with someone who had consumed the drug has even dropped slightly.

The Government is introducing a new drug driving law to help Police do roadside drug driving tests. This will be ready in time for the referendum.

Legalisation of cannabis will mean Police have the tools they need to better detect and enforce the law, as well as improved drug driving education.

What will legalising cannabis mean for mental health?

The Drug Foundation does not endorse cannabis use, but we acknowledge that many New Zealanders use cannabis now - an estimated 80% of New Zealanders have tried cannabis in their lifetime. Reassuringly, there is no evidence from overseas that legalising cannabis leads to more people using, particularly for younger people. Because we don't expect overall cannabis use to go up much, if at all, we wouldn't expect cannabis related harms, including mental health harms, to increase either.

Legal regulation of cannabis is the only way to ensure strong public health controls are in place to minimise the harms from cannabis use that are happening under prohibition. It will mean more money into treatment and drug education. Importantly, legalisation will also reduce stigma for using cannabis, meaning people can more easily get the help they need for any harm they are experiencing.

Doesn't legalisation cannabis conflict with the Government's Smokefree 2025 goal?

No. The Smokefree 2025 goal is not about prohibition - it's about using regulation and education to reduce the number of people who smoke to less than 5% of the population. This is consistent with the goals of the Cannabis Legalisation and Control Bill – which are to decrease cannabis use.

Reducing the number of people who use cannabis is very difficult to do under prohibition. In fact, cannabis use is currently increasing in New Zealand. Under a legalised market, the Government will be able to control the cannabis market and promote less harmful ways of consuming cannabis - such as vaping and using tinctures and oils.

Wouldn't it be better to decriminalise cannabis than legalise?

Decriminalising cannabis would mean people wouldn't get a conviction for their cannabis use, but the black market would still control supply. Legalisation means the Government takes control over the cannabis market,

from seed to sale. This means we can implement regulations that limit access to adults only and make cannabis safer. That's not possible unless we legalise.

Motivation	Prohibition	Decriminalisation	Legal Regulation
PROTECT YOUNG PEOPLE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strict legal age limit - R20• Limit potency• Tax can be used for prevention and health promotion	✗	✗	✓
TAXES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take profits from the black market• Invest tax into prevention and healthcare• Use minimum pricing to reduce use	✗	✗	✓
REGULATIONS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Control potency, portion size and pricing• Plain packaging and health warnings• Quality control and consumer protection	✗	✗	✓
HARM MINIMISATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Removes stigma and barriers to accessing healthcare	✗	✓	✓

What's this about cannabis being a gateway drug?

Despite persistent myths, there is no good evidence that using cannabis leads people to use other more harmful drugs. Many people have used cannabis - up to 80% have ever tried cannabis according to the Dunedin and Christchurch longitudinal studies. But very few have used more harmful drugs - only 1% of NZers used methamphetamine in the past year for example.

Currently people who use cannabis are more likely to be exposed to more harmful drugs because they have to buy cannabis from a drug dealer. Legalising cannabis means people will buy it from a shop, where they will never be offered synthetics or methamphetamine instead.

Won't legalising cannabis 'normalise' it?

We would argue that cannabis is already 'normalised' in Aotearoa – around 590,000 people used cannabis here in the last year. Anyone who wants to get hold of it can do so easily. We also know that cannabis use is not likely to increase under legalisation – this hasn't happened in Canada, for example.

We do want to make sure that legalisation doesn't cause people to use more often or more heavily than they do now. For that reason, the Cannabis Legalisation and Control Bill puts lots of measures in place to make sure cannabis doesn't become more visible than it already is. For example, there will be no advertising, there will be few shops and these will be discrete, and people won't be allowed to smoke cannabis in public places. We won't see cannabis companies sponsoring sports events as we do with alcohol. There will also be money set aside from cannabis sales to help educate young people about cannabis use.

We're confident that legalisation will lead to lower harms from cannabis, and lower rates of heavy use over the long term. What can prohibition offer us in this regard? Ever increasing rates of use, easy access for any person of any age at any time of the day or night and no quality or potency controls. Under prohibition, cannabis use is normal and it's uncontrolled. It's time to turn that around.

Will previous cannabis convictions be expunged?

No, expungements are not part of the Cannabis Legalisation and Control Bill. If cannabis is legalised it would make sense to examine whether past convictions for cannabis use should be removed from people's records. This conversation will be held separately to the conversation around whether we should legalise at all.

How does the Cannabis Legalisation and Control Bill compare with how we currently regulate legal substances like alcohol and tobacco?

The Bill has tighter regulations than both tobacco and alcohol, which is good news for public health:

	Cannabis	Tobacco	Alcohol
Purchase age	20	18	18
Advertising and sponsorship	No	No	Yes
Purchase limit	Yes - 14 g per day	No	No
Retail licence	Yes	No	Yes
Limits on psychoactive ingredient	Yes - 15% THC	No	No
Limits on home grow/brew	Yes 2 plants, max 4 per household	No	No
Online sales	No	Yes	Yes
Use in public	No	Yes aside from Smokefree areas	Yes aside from liquor ban areas