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Media Release

Landmark report on Cannabis and Mental Health released

There is a significant and growing body of evidence on the relationship between mental illness and cannabis, according to a landmark report released by the Mental Health Council of Australia today.

Where There's Smoke: Cannabis and Mental Health found evidence suggesting that regular cannabis use, particularly by those who begin using at a young age, increases the risk of mental illness.

"This Report is the definitive statement on mental health and cannabis," the Hon Rob Knowles, Chair of the Mental Health Council of Australia and former Victorian Minister for Health, said today.

"Up until now, there has been a great deal of controversy about cannabis and mental health – with some saying it causes mental illness, while others saying it has no harmful effects.

"*Where There's Smoke* brings all the evidence together and the research shows that people with a mental illness or predisposition to mental illness are at risk if they use this drug," Mr Knowles said.

The Council's report found that:

- Cannabis use increases young people's risk of mental illness, particularly those with a family history of psychosis
- Cannabis makes almost any mental illness worse
- Cannabis use is associated with other adverse outcomes such as poor education and employment outcomes.

"Cannabis is the third most common drug of dependence in Australia. Nearly 700,000 Australians develop dependence at some point in their lives. All drug use carries risks. Particularly for regular users, we must challenge the notion that cannabis is a safe drug or poses low risks. The evidence in this report blows that argument away, especially for young people," Council CEO, John Mendoza, said.

Former Federal Police Commissioner Mick Palmer, who launched the report said, "This report shows that we are not going to deal with this issue simply through a law and order response. The issue is clearly more complex than that. The demand for cannabis – which means it is freely available around the country – is driven by attitudes and beliefs about the substance. We have to tackle these as the first response."

Professor David Castle, an expert in treatment for mental illness and drug dependence said, "We have little in the way of treatments for the thousands of Australians with cannabis dependence. We must invest in research to have effective treatments available to enable these people to return to productive and fulfilling lives."

***Where There's Smoke: Cannabis and Mental Health* can be obtained by contacting the Mental Health Council of Australia on 02 6285 3100 or www.mhca.org.au**

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The Mental Health Council of Australia is the independent, national representative body of the mental health sector in Australia. MHCA members include representatives of mental health service consumers, carers, special needs groups, clinical service providers, public and private mental health service providers and state/territory mental health peak bodies.

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