Policy preferences for the legalisation and regulation of cannabis in South Australia: What do the SA public want?

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Introduction / Issues: The United Nations have long prohibited the cultivation, supply and possession of psychoactive substances such as cannabis. But the last decade has seen a profound shift in legal responses towards cannabis across the globe. In 2020 the ACT legalised home cultivation and consumption of cannabis, but there remain gaps in knowledge about what reforms the public would support in other states. Conscious that cannabis legalisation is not a binary choice and that there are many policy options, this paper will analyse policy preferences for cannabis legalisation and regulation in South Australia – one of the first places in the world to adopt a civil penalty scheme for home growing, possession and use.

Method / Approach: An anonymous and encrypted panel-based survey was conducted of 3000 South Australians aged 18 and over. The survey assessed the perceived efficacy of current cannabis laws and attitudes towards different regulatory options for cannabis legalisation and regulation for recreational purposes including 1) which offences should be legalised, 2) policy goals, 3) how cannabis should be accessed e.g. commercial outlets, government monopoly and 4) accompanying measures that would be important e.g. bans on advertising.

Key findings: Preliminary findings show that less than 25% of the sampled South Australia public view the current cannabis laws as effective and over half support legalisation and regulation of cannabis for recreational purposes. The preferred models prohibit sales of cannabis alongside alcohol but back a government monopoly and/or home cultivation, bans on advertising and age (but not residency) restrictions.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Public support for cannabis legalisation and regulation appears to be growing in South Australia, provided a tightly regulated model is implemented. Key policy preferences and trade-offs can be fed into stakeholder discussions and policy deliberations about the models that could be adopted.