



OFFICE OF THE MINISTER OF HEALTH
GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

MEDIA RELEASE – MEDICINAL CANNABIS
HON. VAINETUTAI ROSE TOKI BROWN

Cook Islands Minister of Health, the Honourable Mrs Vainetutai Rose Toki Brown, is pleased to announce that the Narcotics and Misuse of Drugs Amendment Act 2023 – including the Narcotics Amendment Regulations 2024 and the Ministry of Health (Pharmacy and Therapeutics) Amendment Regulations 2024 – is now in effect as of today, 2 July 2024.

In brief, the Amendment now allows anyone (whether resident or visitor) who has been prescribed medicinal cannabis by an overseas medical practitioner to import and possess that drug, providing they abide by certain stipulations.

This includes (but is not limited to) requirements that the prescribed cannabis is only to be used by the named person to whom it has been prescribed and that the amount imported or possessed is no more than is reasonably necessary for personal use in accordance with the prescription and also no more than one month's worth when used in accordance with the prescription.

People living outside of the Cook Islands, as well as Cook Islanders who are prescribed medicinal cannabis by an overseas medical practitioner, must comply with the new requirements of the law. All necessary information and complete details on the legal requirements can be found on the Te Marae Ora website or Facebook page and the Tourism Cook Islands website or Facebook page.

The passing and now commencement of this new Amendment has been a two-year journey which began on 1 August 2022, when alongside the general election a referendum was held in which 62% of voters agreed that our cannabis laws should be reviewed to allow for research and medicinal use.

Later that year in November 2022, Government formed the Cannabis Referendum Committee, chaired by Cabinet Minister the Honourable Mr Tingika Elikana and including officials from the Office of the Prime Minister, Crown Law Office and Te Marae Ora, as well as a community representative.

Following the formation of the Committee, the process by which the Amendment was first formulated and then eventually passed in December 2023 included: detailed reviews of current laws and applicable regulations; research visits to New Zealand and Australia; the development of internal protocols; training of relevant staff; and finally, approval of the Amendment's commencement order by Government's Executive Council (Cabinet plus the King's Representative). Proper parliamentary process was also followed at all times.

Government would like to acknowledge and thank the Cannabis Referendum Committee and the legal team of the World Health Organisation (WHO) for diligently working through the legislative and procedural process to ensure that all necessary requirements were duly completed. With the commencement of this Amendment, medicinal cannabis can now be legally brought into the Cook Islands in compliance with the new legislative requirements.

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