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Campaign kicks off in NZ as medical cannabis seeks to 'emerge from the shadows'

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A campaign has launched in New Zealand to highlight the difference between legal medicinal cannabis and the adult use market as the medical industry seeks to emerge “from the shadows”.

Drawing a clear distinction between two markets – legal and illicit – will be critical in reducing stigma and educating the public about medicinal cannabis, according to the firm behind the campaign, Green Leaf Group.



The campaign will feature a symbol of the illicit market – a pair of giant sneakers strung across a power line – in a move to “flip Kiwis’ perceptions on their head”.

It was launched this week in response to research from Green Leaf subsidiary, Cannabis Clinic, showing that while there is almost universal awareness of medicinal cannabis, close to a third are either unsure of its status or believe it is illegal.

Group Chief Executive Dr. Waseem Alzahrer said:

“Since the Medicinal Cannabis Scheme came into effect five years ago, the industry has continued to face significant challenges,” he said. “One of the biggest is that we’re not allowed to openly discuss medicinal cannabis with the public outside of a clinical setting.

“This restriction limits awareness and makes it harder for people to understand what medicinal cannabis is, how it works, and whether it might be a legitimate option for them. As a result, it can feel like we’re operating in the shadows which ultimately hinders people from seeking information and treatment.

“At Cannabis Clinic, we’ve seen the impact medicinal cannabis can have on people’s quality of life. But far too many still miss out. It’s time to stop the stigma and have honest, informed conversations.”

In the survey, while four out of five respondents said they haven’t tried medicinal cannabis, 77% of those would be willing to do so given the right circumstances.

But even then barriers remain. One third believed the cost would be prohibitive with an equal number voicing concerns around potential side effects.

In a further sign of ongoing stigma, 12% said they feared being judged should they turn to medicinal cannabis, with 61% of those worried how family members would react.

Meanwhile, 55% feared being judged by friends, while 30% and 29% were concerned about the views of employers and work colleagues respectively.



Dr Waseem Alzahrer: medical cannabis is operating in the shadows

Would-be patients even expressed nervousness about the attitudes of healthcare practitioners, with 18% believing their GP would look disapprovingly at medicinal cannabis while 12% and 9%

“While nearly two-thirds acknowledge that a negative perception still exists, the findings also highlight clear actions the public believes the industry can take to shift that view,” he said.

“The path forward is clear: greater freedom to educate, visible support from medical professionals, and a stronger distinction from recreational cannabis are all essential to building trust and legitimacy so more Kiwis can access the benefits of medicinal cannabis.”



STEVE JONES

Steve has reported for a number of consumer and B2B titles over a journalism career spanning more than three decades. He is a regular contributor to health journal, The Medical Republic, writing on... [More by Steve Jones < https://www.cannabiz.com.au/author/stevej/>](https://www.cannabiz.com.au/author/stevej/)

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