



*'Without doubt, the drug-reform movement in Australia is closely allied to the Soros-supported movement in the US, so our efforts are dwarfed by comparison.'*  
— *Geraldine Mullins, co-founder of the Australian Parent Movement.*

But Mr Soros also had an eye to public opinion and had gauged it not ready for legalisation. He said attempts to go against the "prevailing consensus" would be only counter-productive.

Mrs Mullins says the controlled sale of drugs, with tax receipts used to treat health problems, is putting the cart before the horse.

"It's what we do with the Quit campaign," she said. "Why introduce a new drug and repeat the syndrome? The scary part is that his logic appeals."

Dr Alex Wodak, director of Alcohol and Drug Services at St Vincent's Hospital and a leading Australian drug law reformer, says cannabis is a "relatively harmless drug that should be sold on a taxed and regulated basis, like alcohol and tobacco".

Currently, only criminals and corrupt police were benefiting. They would be eliminated from the equation if the sale of cannabis were taxed and regulated.

But he would not say the "L" word. "The status of a drug doesn't really tell you how it's controlled," he said. "Cocaine is an illegal drug that can be used legally in medicine and alcohol is a legal drug that can be used illegally." So I am choosing my words carefully." No doubt, with polls showing 60 per cent of Australians opposed to the legalisation of cannabis.

At the Drug Policy Alliance's US office, Ethan Nadelmann frankly says it's all about tactics.

"Our policy is to tax and regulate the sale of marijuana. The reason we don't like to say legalisation is that, to the public, it sounds like you are conceding. If you ask people if they want to legalise cannabis, 20 per cent will say yes. But when you ask if they would support a policy to tax, control and regulate it like alcohol, 40 per cent will say yes.

"So (people) are responding to the connotation of a word, rather than to the substance of the policy."

Meanwhile, Mr Soros has campaigned hard for the legalised use of cannabis as a medical palliative, apparently because he thinks it is a winnable first step.

He has funded legislative efforts in several US States, with some success. But an Arizona bid ended remarkably in 1996.

A Bill became law until legislators realised it was written to include not just cannabis but 116 other Schedule One drugs, including LSD and heroin. Another Bill was quickly passed to scrap the whole idea.

The affair had Republican member, Mike Gardner, wondering aloud: "Why should a New York millionaire (Soros) be writing the laws in Arizona?"

Mr Soros replied, via the media: "I live in one place but I consider myself a citizen of the world. I have foundations in 30 countries and I believe certain universal principles apply everywhere — including Arizona."

This does not mean legalisation, only that a prosecuted drug user does not incur a damaging criminal record. This should become the case in WA next year.

Opponents of harm reduction policies and decriminalisation include parents of addicts. They argue it sends mixed messages and only helps to sustain a user's addiction, and can even result in their death.

They say abstinence is vital and urge a "tough love" approach with mandatory treatment in an environment that removes addicts from access to any drugs. They see drug courts, plus family and community support, as vital. Drug courts allow the option of mandatory treatment to fines or jail.

Geraldine Mullins, co-founder of the Australian Parent Movement, speaks for them all when she expresses concern about Mr Soros:

"He is powerful and he provides a lot of money for an international battle in which Australia is integral and is seen as being one of the most winnable reform targets.

"Without doubt, the drug-reform movement in Australia is closely allied to the Soros-supported movement in the US, so our efforts are dwarfed by comparison.

## What cannabis does

AT THE basic level cannabis can cause feelings of mild euphoria, relaxation, time distortion and intensification of ordinary sensory experiences. People can also become quiet and reflective, or sleepy. These effects are due to the proactive agent in cannabis, known as THC (Delta 9-tetrahydrocannabinol). But there can be many other effects, including serious risks, especially where regular to heavy use is involved. They fall into two categories, of acute and chronic effects.

Acute effects are those that occur after a small dose or a small number of times of use.

They include heightened appetite (the "munchies"); reddening of the whites of the eyes; feelings of anxiety, panic and paranoia; impairment of short-term memory and concentration span, such that it becomes dangerous to drive a motor vehicle or operate machinery; and possible psychotic symptoms, such as hallucinations.

Chronic effects are those which can occur after a period of regular use (daily use over a period of years or decades). These include possible cannabis addiction; probable

"To make things worse, those responsible for public health in Australia have been cleverly drawn into promoting strategies dressed up as compassion but are really about creating chaos in the system and opening the way for cannabis to eventually be sold like alcohol and tobacco.

"We all know the terrible social costs of alcohol and tobacco."

Wendy Herbert, spokeswoman for the WA Coalition Against Drugs, agrees health officials have done too little to highlight the risk of addiction and mental illness in cannabis use.

She says the proposed laws will be a "green light" to normalising the practice.

"We believe most children can be taught to say 'no' if given information and family support, and not merely information to supposedly help them use drugs safely. No drugs are safe.

"We need a 'say no' approach backed by the law and by education and intervention for young people through mandatory counselling that involves families.

"People with an entrenched drug problem should be subjected to mandatory rehabilitation orders, perhaps via the Drug Court, to return them to a drug free state, which most

will welcome when achieved. For all this to happen, the illegality must stay. Very, very few people get criminal records for simple drug use anyway."

**I**N his 1995 autobiography, George Soros initially states he is "agnostic" on the big question of legalisation.

But later in the book, he says he could imagine the legalisation of "less harmful and less addictive" drugs might help society by reducing criminality "by around 80 per cent".

He says cannabis is non-addictive but that is wrong. Studies have proved up to 10 per cent of regular users can develop dependency.

"... I would have a strictly controlled distribution network for such drugs and keep prices low enough to destroy the drug trade," he says in the book.

"Once that was attained, I would keep raising the prices, very much like the excise duty on cigarettes, but I would make an exception for regulated addicts in order to discourage crime."

Part of the tax income would go on prevention and treatment work, and he would foster "social opprobrium" of drug use.

respiratory diseases; memory damage and decline in other intellectual skills which can particularly affect school performance and occupational performance in adults; risk of giving birth to low-weight babies; toxic psychosis; and increased risk of developing schizophrenia.

There can also be a loss of energy and motivation, known as amotivational syndrome; depression; reduced libido; and irregular menstrual cycles.

THCs do have anti-nausea properties which reportedly make the drug useful in some clinical settings. But it can be fatal when combined with alcohol because it suppresses the vomiting reflex in teenagers who smoke a joint or two and drink heavily.

Because of its ability to boost appetite, cannabis has been used as an anti-anorexic agent for patients with AIDS wasting syndrome.

But because of potentially serious side effects, the prescription drug in question, Marinol, comes with an information sheet warning that it can cause several of the acute effects mentioned above, including "full blown psychosis".

