



Parliamentary Budget Office

Impact of legalising cannabis on police resources

Police time and operating costs

Parliamentary Budget Office

We provide independent fiscal, economic and financial advice to all members of the Parliament of Victoria. Our objective is to inform policy development and public debate in parliament and the community.

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In brief

Recreational use, possession, supply, or cultivation of cannabis remains illegal at the federal level in Australia. The Australian Capital Territory is the only jurisdiction in Australia to legalise the use and possession of cannabis for private adult use up to prescribed limits, but the commercial sale of cannabis remains prohibited.

Victoria uses a 'de facto' decriminalisation model where criminal penalties for cannabis apply, but police or the courts may use their discretion in enforcing criminal offences. Victoria Police implement this through the Child Caution Program and Cannabis Cautioning Program for those possessing up to 50 grams of cannabis. Those found with larger amounts may be charged with possession or trafficking.

This advice considers the impact of legalising cannabis on police resources by:

- outlining the number of alleged offender incidents for cannabis-related crimes in Victoria from 2018–19 to 2024–25
- estimating the associated total police time and operating costs of policing cannabis-related crimes.

Alleged offender incidents

An alleged offender is a person suspected of committing one or more offences within a single incident. The Crime Statistics Agency assigns an alleged offender incident to the principal offence – the most serious offence committed within the incident. We have restricted our analysis to alleged offender incidents where the cannabis-related crime was the principal offence.

- If an alleged offender was found in possession of cannabis and had committed an offensive language violation, this incident would be attributed to the 'use and possession' offence category because this was the more serious crime. Figure 1 captures these incidents.
- If an alleged offender was found in possession of cannabis and had assaulted someone, this incident would be attributed to the 'assault' offence category because it was the more serious crime. Figure 1 does not capture these alleged offenders because the cannabis-related crime was not the more serious crime in the incident.

Figure 1 – Alleged offender incidents in Victoria where cannabis was the principal offence

Offence category	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Use and possession – warning or caution	3,257	3,841	3,184	2,736	2,771	2,499	2,527
Use and possession – all other outcomes	2,014	2,342	2,744	1,908	1,732	1,472	1,549
Dealing and trafficking	841	861	910	690	622	554	494
Cultivate and manufacture	808	729	916	725	656	566	522
Total	6,920	6,920	7,773	7,754	6,059	5,781	5,091

Note: All other outcomes include arrest, summons, penalty notice, intent to summons, not authorised, unsolved, and other.

Source: Crime Statistic Agency.

There were 5,091 alleged offender incidents in 2024–25 where a cannabis-related crime was the principal offence. Alleged offender incidents for cannabis were atypically high during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–21 and 2021–22. While there is no definitive explanation of the reasons for this increase, the relevant literature suggests that it may be due to increased:

- proactive policing
- drug use stemming from self-medication due to pandemic-related stress
- drug use due to a lack of alternative activities available to people during COVID-19 lockdowns.

Total police time

We use the number of alleged offender incidents to estimate the total police time associated with policing cannabis-related crime. This approach ensures we are not double counting police time as an alleged offender may commit multiple cannabis-related offences within the same incident but is only processed once by police.

Police time is largely a function of the:

- number of alleged offenders for cannabis violations
- severity of the cannabis violation, with more severe crimes (such as cultivating cannabis) requiring more police time on average compared to low-level offences (such as possessing cannabis).

Figure 2 – Estimated hours of policing cannabis-related crime in Victoria

(hours)	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Use and possession – warning or caution	10,400	12,300	10,200	8,800	8,900	8,000	8,100
Use and possession – all other outcomes	26,100	30,300	35,600	24,700	22,400	19,100	20,100
Dealing and trafficking	14,200	14,600	15,400	11,700	10,500	9,400	8,300
Cultivate and manufacture	31,400	28,400	35,600	28,200	25,500	22,000	20,300
Total	82,200	85,600	96,800	73,400	67,400	58,500	56,800

Note: All other outcomes include arrest, summons, penalty notice, intent to summons, not authorised, unsolved, and other. As we could not disaggregate the data by each outcome, we have assumed people in this category incur the same average police time. Figure is rounded to the nearest hundred. Figure may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Parliamentary Budget Office.

We estimate that police spent around 56,800 hours on cannabis-related crime in Victoria in 2024–25, which is equivalent to just over 27 full-time equivalent (FTE) police officers working 40 hours per week.

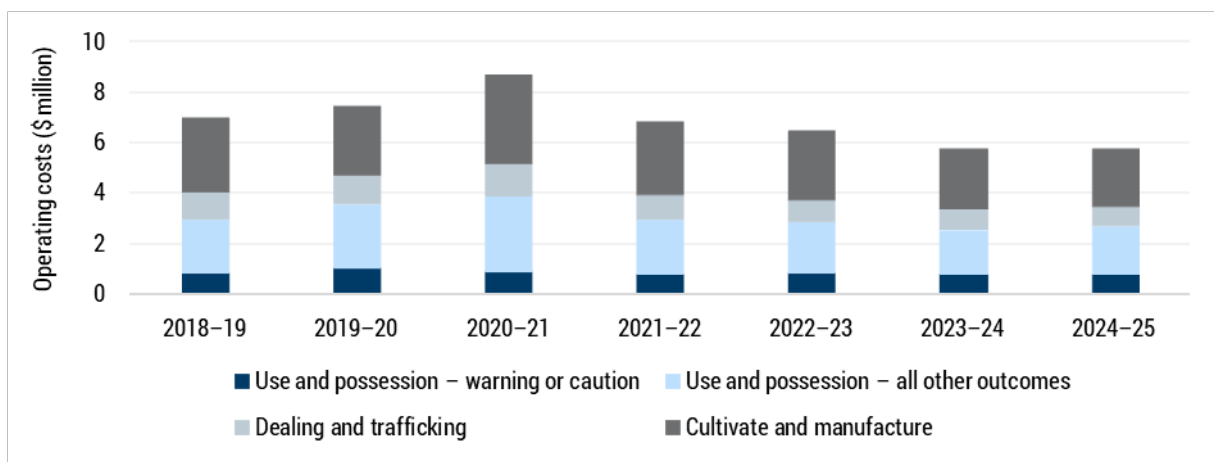
Were cannabis legalised, every hour spent policing cannabis-related crime could be diverted to policing other crimes and activities. The opportunity cost: expending resourcing on policing cannabis forgoes the opportunity to spend them on another area (policing other crimes).

Several factors have led to a reduction in total police time associated with policing cannabis-related crime since its peak in 2020–21. Not only has the number of alleged offenders fallen, but a greater proportion now consist of low-level use and possession offenders. These offenders require less time to process on average. Furthermore, a higher percentage of use and possession offenders are now receiving a warning or caution instead of an arrest, which is less time-intensive for police.

Total police operating costs

We estimate that the operating costs of policing cannabis-related crime in Victoria were \$5.8 million in 2024–25. It is likely that these costs will rise in the future due to increases in police salaries and Victorian population growth, which, all else being equal, results in a higher number of alleged offenders over time.

Figure 3 – Estimated operating costs of policing cannabis-related crime in Victoria



Note: All other outcomes include arrest, summons, penalty notice, intent to summons, not authorised, unsolved, and other.

Source: Parliamentary Budget Office.

Legalising cannabis would not necessarily generate savings equal to the estimated operating cost for policing. It may in fact generate very little savings, if any.

- Most, if not all, of the hours spent policing cannabis-related crime occur during business-as-usual policing activities and duties. Police would have consumed these hours regardless of whether cannabis is legalised.
- Many cannabis-related crimes occur alongside other offences – some co-offences are less severe, whilst others are more serious. Police would still incur a cost to process an alleged offender with co-offences, even if the cannabis-related offence was no longer valid.
- Some costs may increase from legalising cannabis, including policing of cannabis use by individuals driving vehicles and policing of a continuing black market and activities related to borders.

Context

Request

On 21 January 2025, Mr David Limbrick MP, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan, asked the Parliamentary Budget Officer to provide independent advice about the impact of legalising cannabis on police resources in Victoria, and using any cost savings to reorganise the police budget.

Scope

In this advice we consider the:

- number of alleged offender incidents for cannabis-related crimes in Victoria from 2018–19 to 2024–25
- estimated total police time and operating costs associated with policing cannabis-related crime in Victoria.

Limitations

The ability of the Victorian Government to legalise the sale and possession of cannabis in the state depends on Australian Government legislation and regulations concerning controlled substances. Under section 109 of the Australian Constitution, federal law overrides state law in instances where the law of a state or territory is inconsistent with a law of the Australian Government. We make no judgement on the ability of the Victorian Government to legalise cannabis where inconsistencies between federal law and state law exist.

There is considerable uncertainty surrounding the average hours of police time required to arrest and process someone for cannabis use, possession, supply, or cultivation. We sought information from Victoria Police on the average time to process alleged offenders for cannabis-related crimes, but they did not have sufficient information that they could provide. As such, we have relied on publicly available information to derive an estimate of the average police time required to process an alleged offender for a cannabis-related crime. Given the uncertainty and limited information, the total police time and associated costs we present in this advice should be considered with caution.

We prepared this advice on 17 November 2025.

Background

In this section

This section provides background on the different models of regulating cannabis and an overview of the jurisdictions globally that have legalised the sale of cannabis for adult use.

Models of regulating cannabis

In general, there are 4 types of models for regulating cannabis: prohibition, medicinal, decriminalisation, and legalisation.

Prohibition

Prohibition is a policy and legal framework that makes it a criminal offence to cultivate, manufacture, supply, possess, or use cannabis. Under prohibition, cannabis is treated as a controlled substance. Breaches of prohibition laws result in a criminal record that attracts legal penalties, such as fines, community orders, or imprisonment.

Medicinal cannabis

Medicinal cannabis involves the legalisation of cannabis for medicinal purposes only. Under this model, a registered healthcare practitioner prescribes medicinal cannabis products to patients suffering from a medical condition or symptom. The cultivation, manufacture, supply, possession, or use of cannabis for all other purposes remains prohibited and attracts criminal penalties.

Decriminalisation

Decriminalisation involves removing criminal penalties associated with use and possession of cannabis for personal use. Under this model, cannabis would remain illegal, but its use and possession would not be criminally prosecuted. There are 2 types of cannabis decriminalisation:

- De jure ('in law') decriminalisation – criminal laws are reformed to remove the criminal offence of use and possession of cannabis in favour of civil or administrative penalties such as civil fines, drug education, or drug treatment. For example, an alleged offender charged in the Northern Territory for possessing a non-trafficable quantity of cannabis (less than 50 grams) will only face a fine of up to 50 penalty units under section 7B of the *Misuse of Drugs Act 1990* (NT).
- De facto ('in practice') decriminalisation – criminal penalties for cannabis remain; however, police or the courts may use their discretion in enforcing criminal offences. For example, first-time cannabis offenders found to be possessing small amounts of cannabis may receive a police caution rather than being arrested and charged for possession. This model is adopted in Victoria through the Child Caution Program and Cannabis Cautioning Program.

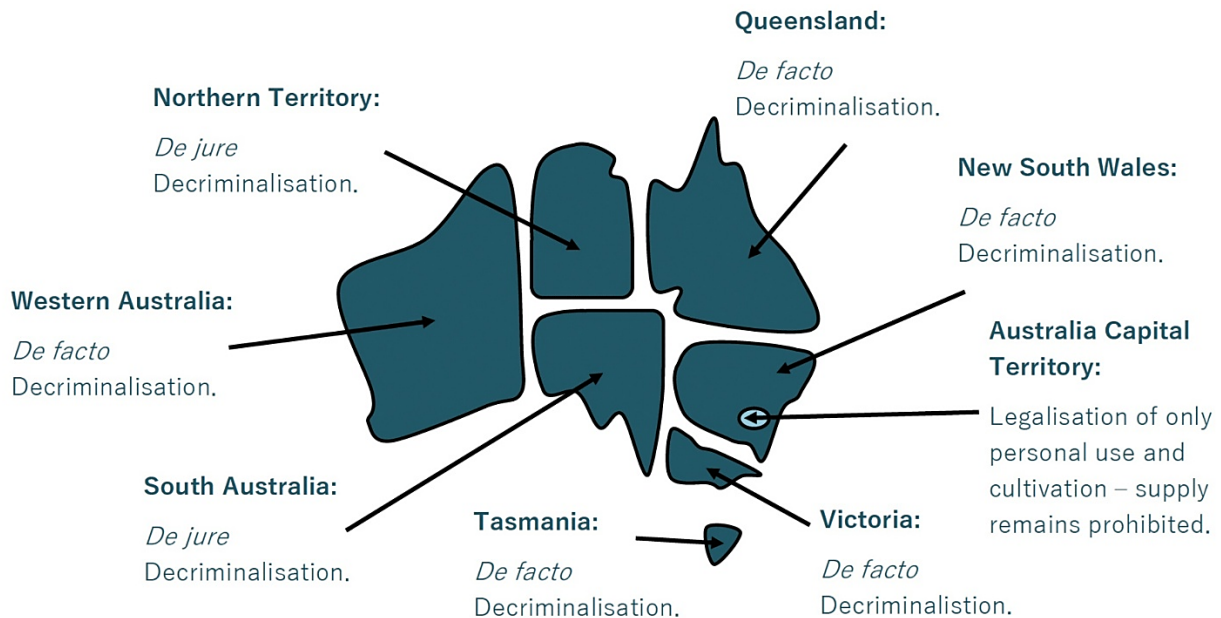
Legalisation

Legalisation involves removing all cannabis-related criminal penalties for adult use. Under this model, regulations and policies are introduced to manage where and how cannabis can be produced, sold, or consumed. There are different forms of cannabis legalisation, with the key distinction being whether they allow for the sale of cannabis products:

- Full legalisation – allows for the use and possession of cannabis for adult use, including its sale. Cultivation is generally restricted to licensed farms and producers.

- Partial legalisation – allows for the use and possession of cannabis, but its sale remains prohibited. Restrictions are often placed on the amount of cannabis someone can legally possess or cultivate in private. The Australian Capital Territory adopted this model of partial legalisation.

Figure 4 – Cannabis regulation in Australian states and territories



Source: Burnett Institute.

All Australian states and territories apply some form of cannabis decriminalisation to varying degrees, except for the Australian Capital Territory, which has legalised the adult use and cultivation of cannabis, but not its commercial sale.

Legalising the sale of cannabis for adult use

Cannabis use, including its sale, is legal in only a few jurisdictions globally.

Figure 5 – Jurisdictions that have legalised the possession, use, and sale of cannabis

Jurisdiction	Model of supply	Outline of legalisation
Canada	Commercial sale of cannabis	<p>Legal to possess, use, and supply cannabis for adult use.</p> <p>Adults are allowed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> possess up to 30g of dried cannabis in public, which is the maximum amount of cannabis that be purchased at a time grow up to 4 plants per household. <p>Provinces and territories are responsible for regulating the sale and distribution of cannabis in their jurisdiction.</p>
Germany	Non-profit cannabis club distribution	<p>Adults can cultivate, possess, and use cannabis.</p> <p>Adults can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> possess up to 25 grams of cannabis in public

Jurisdiction	Model of supply	Outline of legalisation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> possess up to 50 grams of cannabis in private grow up to 3 cannabis plants per household for private use. <p>The German Government adopted a 2-pillar approach to legalising cannabis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first pillar allows for personal cannabis cultivation and possession, but commercial sales remain prohibited. However, adults over 21 years can become a member of a non-profit cannabis club with up to 500 members, which are authorised to distribute cannabis to its members in limited amounts. Members can get up to 25 grams of cannabis per day or 50 grams per month from their cannabis club. The second pillar, which has yet to come into effect, involves testing the commercial sale of cannabis in regionally limited and controlled pilot projects.
Malta	Non-profit cannabis club distribution	<p>It is legal to cultivate, possess, and use cannabis in private.</p> <p>Adults can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> possess up to 7 grams of cannabis in public cultivate up to 4 cannabis plants at home. <p>The commercial, for-profit sale of cannabis remains prohibited. However, adults can become members of non-profit cannabis clubs, which can cultivate cannabis for distribution amongst their members, with membership limited to 500 people. The clubs may distribute up to 7 grams of cannabis per day to each member.</p>
United States	Commercial sale of cannabis	<p>Cannabis remains illegal at the federal level. However, it is legalised for adult use in 24 states, 3 territories, and the District of Columbia.</p> <p>Each jurisdiction has its own specific regulations in terms of the licencing of producers and dispensaries, excise taxes, and restrictions on the amount of cannabis an adult can possess or private cultivation.</p>
Uruguay	Commercial sale of cannabis	<p>Legal to possess, use, and supply cannabis for adult use.</p> <p>A government agency operates as a monopoly wholesaler and is the sole buyer from licensed producers and sole supplier to licensed pharmacies. Licensed pharmacies then sell cannabis products to Uruguayan citizens and permanent residents aged 18 years or over who are registered with the government agency.</p> <p>Registered consumers can also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> grow up to 6 plants per household (maximum total yield of 480 grams per year) join 'cannabis clubs' comprising between 15 and 45 people that can collectively grow up to 99 plants per year.

Note: Thailand had previously legalised cannabis for adult use and sale, but the Thai Government reclassified cannabis as a controlled substance in June 2025 and restricted its use and sale to medicinal purposes only.

Source: Parliament of Victoria, Parliamentary Budget Office.

Many jurisdictions have prohibited the sale of cannabis, but have partially legalised cannabis use and possession, often up to a prescribed amount and limited to consumption in private. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Georgia
- Luxembourg
- Mexico
- South Africa
- the Australian Capital Territory.

The Australian Capital Territory allows adults to possess up to 50g of dry cannabis material, 150g of wet material, and cultivate up to 2 plants per person (or 4 plants per household) of cannabis for personal use in private.

Alleged offenders for cannabis-related crime in Victoria

In this section

This section outlines the:

- different options available to police when choosing to caution or charge a person for a cannabis-related offence
- number of recorded offences and alleged offender incidents for cannabis-related crime in Victoria since 2018–19.

Policing of cannabis-related crime

In Victoria, the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* covers all cannabis-related offences in the state. Cannabis-related offences are captured in broad drug-related offences, including:

- trafficking in a drug or drugs of dependence (s. 71 to 71AC)
- possession of substance, material, documents, or equipment for trafficking in a drug of dependence (s. 71A)
- supply of drug of dependence to a child (s. 71B)
- cultivation of narcotic plants (s. 72 to 72B)
- possession of a drug of dependence (s. 73)
- use of a drug of dependence (s. 75).

There are also similar offences for possession, supply, cultivation, and trafficking drugs under the *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cth).

In Australia, there are different methods available to police when enforcing cannabis offences:

- Caution or diversion – police provide offenders with a formal caution, which seeks to divert offenders away from the criminal justice system and towards education and/or treatment programs. Police confiscate the cannabis, and no criminal record is recorded.
- Civil fines – no criminal record is recorded if the offender pays a civil fine within a certain number of days. If the offender does not pay this fine, they may be criminally charged for the use and possession of cannabis and be summonsed to court. Likewise, police confiscate the cannabis when issuing civil fines.
- Criminal charges – police confiscate the cannabis, charge the alleged offender, and issue a summons to appear in court, thereby sanctioning them through the criminal justice system. The additional police time required to charge and process offenders is more expensive and time-consuming than cautions and diversions.

Cautions, civil fines, and warnings are generally only available for minor cannabis offences relating to small amounts of cannabis use and possession, whereas criminal charges are available for all cannabis-related crimes.

Victoria Police utilise 2 different programs for diverting offenders away from the criminal justice system for a small, non-trafficable amount of cannabis (up to 50 grams):

- Child Caution Program – is available for persons under 18 years only. When issuing a Child Caution, police explain to the offender and their guardian about the illegality and risks of cannabis, as well as provide referral pathways for alcohol and other drug services or relevant youth services; however, attendance is not mandatory.
- Cannabis Cautioning Program – to be eligible, the offender must be 18 years and older, must admit to the offence, cannot have any concurrent offences, and can only be cautioned twice. Offenders are requested to attend an alcohol or other drug service for assessment within 28 days. Police offer a non-compulsory education session, 'Cautious with Cannabis', which is a two-hour face-to-face education session to reduce drug-related harm and provide referral pathways for ongoing support.

Victoria Police also operate a Drug Diversion Program, but this program is limited to the use and possession of small amounts of illicit drugs other than cannabis.

Alleged offender incidents

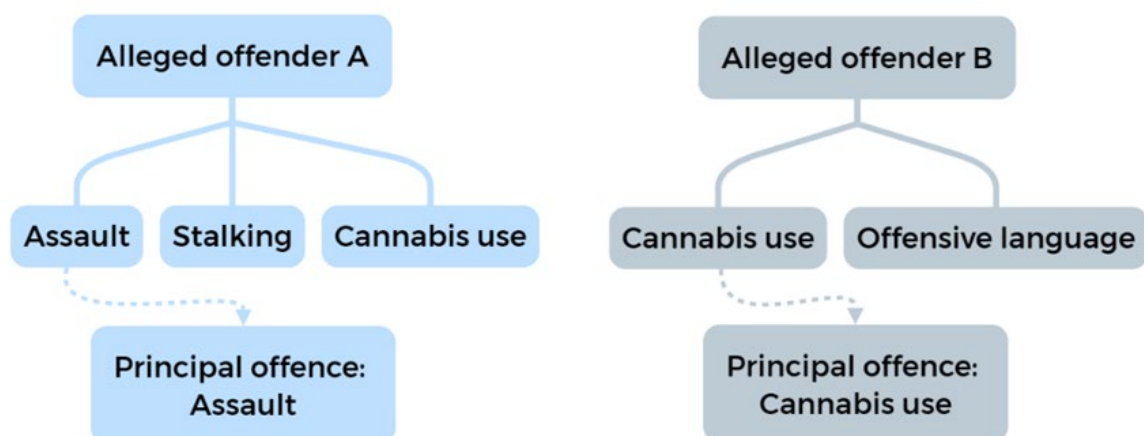
The Crime Statistics Agency is responsible for publishing recorded crime data in Victoria and presents this information across various data populations, including:

- recorded offences – captures criminal acts and violations that could attract a penalty under the Victorian legal system
- alleged offender incidents – captures the number of incidents involving an alleged offender who has committed one or more criminal offences.

There are inherently more recorded offences than alleged offender incidents because an alleged offender incident represents one alleged offender but may involve multiple recorded offences.

Where an alleged offender has committed more than one offence within the single incident, the Crime Statistics Agency assigns the incident according to the more serious offence (known as the principal offence). This is based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics National Offence Index.

Figure 6 – Determination of most serious offence (principal offence) in an alleged offender incident



Source: Crime Statistics Agency, Parliamentary Budget Office.

We have used alleged offender incidents instead of recorded offences to estimate the total police time and costs associated with policing cannabis-related crime. This approach ensures that we are not double counting, as an alleged offender may commit multiple cannabis-related offences within the single incident but is only processed once by police.

The information in Figure 7 below represents the number of alleged offender incidents where the most serious offence was a cannabis-related offence. There are implications and caveats when capturing alleged offender incidents for cannabis-related crimes:

- The data will inherently undercount the number of alleged offenders that committed a cannabis-related offence. For example, if an alleged offender was found to be possessing cannabis, as well as dealing and trafficking methamphetamine, the Crime Statistics Agency would assign the alleged offender incident to dealing and trafficking because this is the most serious offence. In such cases, the alleged offender would not be captured in Figure 7 because the cannabis-related offence was not the most serious offence in the incident.
- An alleged offender incident may have multiple principal offences that are equally ranked. For example, if an alleged offender is found to be possessing cannabis and possessing heroin, both these offences would fall under 'drug possession and use' and have the same rank. In such cases, these alleged offenders would be captured in Figure 7.
- Where an alleged offender incident has multiple principal offences with equal ranking, the principal outcome may not be the outcome for the cannabis-related offence. This is because the principal outcome for an alleged offender incident is the outcome of the most serious principal offence.

Figure 7 – Alleged offender incidents for principal cannabis-related crimes in Victoria

Offence category	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Use and possession – warning or caution	3,257	3,841	3,184	2,736	2,771	2,499	2,527
Use and possession – all other outcomes	2,014	2,342	2,744	1,908	1,732	1,472	1,549
Dealing and trafficking	841	861	910	690	622	554	494
Cultivate and manufacture	808	729	916	725	656	566	522
Total	6,920	6,920	7,773	7,754	6,059	5,781	5,091

Note: All other outcomes include arrest, summons, penalty notice, intent to summons, not authorised, unsolved, and other.

Source: Crime Statistic Agency.

In 2024–25, there were 5,091 alleged offender incidents where a cannabis-related crime was the most serious offence, which was 26% lower than in 2018–19 and 35% lower than during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–21. Most of this reduction can be attributed to fewer use and possession offences over this period.

Analysis from the Crime Statistics Agency showed that the number of drug possession offences across all drug types was higher than anticipated at certain periods of the state's lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are various reasons provided in the literature to explain this increase, including:

- increased proactive policing
- increased drug use stemming from self-medication due to pandemic-related stress
- increased drug use due to a lack of alternative activities available to people during lockdown.

The Crime Statistics Agency's data shows significantly fewer alleged offender incidents than recorded offences for cannabis-related crimes. There are 2 reasons for this:

- Alleged offenders are committing multiple offences within the single incident; in many cases, the cannabis-related crime is not the most serious offence. These cases would be coded as multiple recorded offences but would not be captured in Figure 7 (alleged offender incidents) because the cannabis-related crime was not the most serious offence.
- If someone is found to be using cannabis and possessing cannabis within the single incident, this would be recorded as 2 offences under use and possession (one for use and one for possession) but captured as a single alleged offender incident.

Total hours spent and cost of policing cannabis-related crime in Victoria

In this section

This section outlines the total estimated police time and related costs associated with policing cannabis-related crime from 2018–19 to 2024–25.

Our approach of using alleged offender incidents instead of recorded offences implies that total hours of police time and related costs are:

- largely a function of the most serious offence committed within an incident, rather than the number of offences committed
- attributable to the most serious offence committed within an incident. This ensures that alleged offenders who have committed a cannabis-related crime as well as a more serious crime are excluded, as police would have incurred a cost to process these individuals irrespective of whether the cannabis-related crime occurred.

There is significant uncertainty surrounding the average hours of police time required to arrest and process someone for cannabis-related crimes, particularly for offences relating to dealing, trafficking, and cultivation. We have relied on publicly available information to estimate the average police time across different offence categories, which we then use to derive our costs. Given this uncertainty, the total police time and associated costs we present should be considered with caution.

Total police time

Average police time is a function of how serious the crime is – more serious crimes (e.g. cultivation) require more police time on average than low-level offences (e.g. use and possession).

Figure 8 – Total police time associated with policing cannabis-related crime in Victoria (hours)

Offence category	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Use and possession – warning or caution	10,400	12,300	10,200	8,800	8,900	8,000	8,100
Use and possession – all other outcomes	26,100	30,300	35,600	24,700	22,400	19,100	20,100
Dealing and trafficking	14,200	14,600	15,400	11,700	10,500	9,400	8,300
Cultivate and manufacture	31,400	28,400	35,600	28,200	25,500	22,000	20,300
Total	82,200	85,600	96,800	73,400	67,400	58,500	56,800

Note: All other outcomes include arrest, summons, penalty notice, intent to summons, not authorised, unsolved, and other. As we could not disaggregate the data by each outcome, we have assumed people in this category incur the same average police time. Figure is rounded to the nearest hundred. Figure may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Crime Statistics Agency.

We estimate that police spent around 56,800 hours on cannabis-related crime in Victoria in 2024–25, which is equivalent to around 27 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) police officers working 40 hours per week. This does not mean that legalising cannabis would reduce the number of police officers employed. Rather, police hours should be viewed as an opportunity cost; that is, for every hour spent policing cannabis-related crime, an hour is foregone policing other crimes and activities.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–21, police spent 96,800 hours policing cannabis-related crime. This was 70% higher than 2024–25 levels, which reflect a combination of there being:

- more alleged offenders for cannabis-related crimes in 2020–21
- a higher proportion of alleged offenders who received a warning or caution in 2024–25. This suggests that police are utilising the Child Caution and Cannabis Cautioning Program more frequently, which requires less police time to process on average compared to other offences.

Total policing operating costs

We estimate the total operating cost of policing cannabis-related crime in Victoria was \$5.8 million in 2024–25. We anticipate that these costs would likely increase in the future given a combination of:

- more cannabis-related offences, in part due to natural population increases over time
- higher police officer salary costs from annual remuneration increases, as set out by the relevant enterprise agreement.

The costs associated with policing the cultivation of cannabis comprised 40% of police costs, despite only representing around 10% of alleged offenders. These offenders require significantly more police time to process compared to other cannabis-related offences.

Figure 9 – Operating cost of policing cannabis-related crime in Victoria (\$ million)

Offence category	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Use and possession – warning or caution	0.8	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8
Use and possession – all other outcomes	2.1	2.5	3.0	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.9
Dealing and trafficking	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.8
Cultivate and manufacture	2.9	2.7	3.5	2.9	2.7	2.4	2.3
Total	7.0	7.5	8.7	6.9	6.5	5.8	5.8

Note: All other outcomes include arrest, summons, penalty notice, intent to summons, not authorised, unsolved, and other.

Source: Parliamentary Budget Office.

We note that legalising cannabis may not generate savings equal to the costs outlined in Figure 9 – or generate any savings at all. This is because the policing of cannabis-related offences occurs during normal operations. As such, the associated costs are considered business-as-usual in that they would be incurred regardless of whether cannabis is legalised. In other words, while police would no longer enforce cannabis laws, the freed-up resources would likely be redirected to other routine policing activities, such as enforcing other crimes or targeting different drugs of dependence.

The potential police cost savings from legalising cannabis would also be subdued by the fact that many cannabis-related offences co-occur with other offences. Analysis from the Crime Statistics Agency showed that 40% of cannabis use or possession offences co-occurred with other offences. In such cases, it is unclear whether police arrested the individual primarily for the cannabis violation itself, or if the cannabis offence was incidental to another crime. For example, if an alleged offender was found to be possessing cannabis only after being stopped for an offensive language violation. The police would still incur a cost of processing that individual for the offensive language, irrespective of whether there had been a cannabis-related crime.

Some costs may increase from legalising cannabis, including policing of cannabis use by individuals driving vehicles and policing of a continuing black market and activities related to borders.

Case study: Police activity and funding for enforcement of cannabis legalisation laws in Canada

The Canadian Government legalised the supply of cannabis in 2018 and announced it would provide up to CAD \$161 million in funding over 5 years, including CAD \$81 million to provinces and territories, to support frontline police in the enforcement of the new cannabis law. The funding included:

- police training to recognise drug-impaired driving
- access to drug screening devices for testing of drug-impaired driving

The Canadian Government also committed CAD \$113.5 million over 5 years to Public Safety Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the Canada Border Services Agency to prevent:

- organised crime from infiltrating the legalised system
- cross-border transfers of cannabis to other jurisdictions with different regulations.

According to Statistics Canada, the country's national statistics office, after 14 months of cannabis legalisation, police had reported 18,097 incidents of alleged breaches of the new laws. Most of the breaches (64%) related to importation and exportation. Prior to legalisation, possession accounted for around 75% of cannabis violations. The large number of importation or exportation was attributed to possible misunderstandings in the new regulations in terms of the legality of purchasing cannabis from abroad and importing it into the country.

Statistics Canada reported that police received CAD \$24.3 million in funding in 2018–19 related to enforcing the new cannabis regulations, most of which was received by Canada's federal police force the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

In 2018–19, there were 236,700 police training hours attributed to law enforcement of cannabis legalisation in Canada, comprising:

- 143,740 hours of Standardised Field Sobriety Testing – a preliminary test for detecting cognitive and psychomotor impairment of drivers due to drug consumption
- 18,830 hours of refresher courses for Standardised Field Sobriety Testing
- 74,120 hours of Drug Recognition Expert training, which trains police officers to test for drug impaired driving as well as to scientifically determine the type of substance involved.

We note that this data was reported for one year only (that is, directly after legalisation) and it is unclear as to the level of ongoing training and funding provided to frontline police in Canada from legalising cannabis. Furthermore, we could not find any published studies assessing whether there were any long-term changes in the overall funding of frontline police in Canada that could be directly attributed to legalising cannabis.

Source: Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, Parliamentary Budget Office.

Attachment A – Data sources

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