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New trial in Australia uses cannabis for spinal cord injury induced chronic pain

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This world-first trial is looking for new participants



Scientists at the University of Sydney, Australia have been awarded $1.7 million from New South Wales Ministry of Health, to research a new treatment for chronic pain which commonly affects people with spinal cord injuries.

Up to 80 percent of people with a spinal cord injury develop some degree of persistent pain. A specific type of pain known as neuropathic pain is caused by damage to the spinal cord. It is often described as stabbing, burning, or a numbing, 'pins and needles'-like sensation. The pain can be so severe that many regard it as the most debilitating part of their injury.

Recent research by the National Drug Strategy Household Survey found 2.7 percent of Australia's population took up cannabis use for medicinal purposes in 2019 – a figure which has been rapidly rising since the drug was made available via prescription in late 2016.

In partnership with the Lambert Initiative for Cannabinoid Therapeutics, this world-first trial is examining whether the non-intoxicating component of cannabis – cannabidiol (CBD) – is safe and effective in reducing neuropathic pain in people with spinal cord injury.

The trial will be run at Neuroscience Research Australia (NeuRA) in Randwick, Sydney, a world-leading facility for brain imaging and spinal cord injury research.

"Success of this trial would trailblaze future research on the benefits of CBD in other neuropathic pain conditions which, much like neuropathic pain following spinal cord injury, remain undertreated and misunderstood", said the study's co-investigator Professor Iain McGregor from the University of Sydney's Lambert Initiative for Cannabinoid Therapeutics.