

The top half of the slide features a background of vibrant green cannabis plants. The word "Hanf" is written in a large, white, serif font across the center of this section.

# Hanf

A white rectangular banner with a thin gold border is positioned below the "Hanf" text. The word "Institut" is written in a large, black, serif font across the center of this banner.

# Institut

The bottom half of the slide has a dark green background with a close-up image of cannabis leaves. The text is white and underlined.

The current situation of cannabis patients  
in Austria – and what needs to be done

Toni Straka

58th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

Vienna, March 12, 2015



# Cannabis has a long tradition in Austria

Empress Maria Theresa, who introduced mandatory public schooling in 1774, was prescribed a cannabis tincture against insomnia and “all other worries” by her personal physician Gerard van Swieten.



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# The pre-war model: Sold at the tobacconist

Nil cigarettes, produced by state owned Tabakregie, had a cannabis content of up to 10 percent until the 1920s



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# Status quo since 1962



**Cannabis has nevertheless become the 3rd most used drug of choice after alcohol and nicotine.**

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# Key facts on Cannabis in Austria

- ➔ 500.000 occasional consumers
- ➔ 500.000 regular consumers (>2 units/week)
- ➔ More than 90 percent consume responsibly

Source: Sucht- und Drogenkoordination Wien, BMI, OBIG, Drogenbericht 2013

- § Consumption of cannabis is technically non-punishable, but possession, purchases and passing it on to others – even when only sharing a joint – are illegalized.
- § Production of Cannabis for medical uses is legal for state-controlled entities, but the sale of the natural remedy itself is prohibited.
- § Austria allows the sale of synthetic Cannabis pharmaceuticals such as Dronabinol (containing THC) and Sativex with a prescription from a licensed physician.
- § While it is illegal to grow cannabis with the intent to produce the psychoactive cannabinoid THC, Austrians can purchase cannabis seeds and seedlings legally.
- § Only THC is prohibited, but none of the other hundreds of Cannabinoids.



**Based on data from Colorado, about 200,000 Austrians could qualify as cannabis patients**

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# The situation for Cannabis patients

## What they get...

Currently, patients can only get Dronabinol and Sativex with a prescription.

There is a setback: Synthetic cannabinoids cost up to 20 times more than the same amount of THC from the underground market.

Costs can easily exceed **€ 1,000** per month.

Health insurance oftentimes does not cover these costs.

Would you spend **€1,000** on a synthetic cannabis derivative or **€100** on the real thing?



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# ...and what they want:



**Patients unilaterally declare that they prefer natural cannabis or cannabis concentrates in comparison to synthetic cannabinoids**



**Zero deaths in 10,000 years make it the safest medicine**

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# Priority for Patients

## Short term

- ➔ Decriminalise possession
- ➔ Allow home-grows for patients (or a caregiver) with a doctor's recommendation

## Medium term

- ➔ Permits for non-profit grow cooperatives (Cannabis Social Clubs)

## Long term

- ➔ Rewrite Austrian drug law according to scientific evidence: Cannabis is a safe medicine



**Every day on the path to legal access of natural cannabis is another day of pain and sickness for patients!**

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# Benefits

## LEGALISE - REGULATE - EDUCATE - MEDICATE

- ✓ Patients want indeed therapy instead of punishment.
- ✓ Self-growing guarantees best quality control.
- ✓ Patients can grow their medicine of choice.
- ✓ First step to decriminalise those first who need it most.
- ✓ Allows more studies on effects.
- ✓ Job creation in a rapidly growing industry.
- ✓ Taxation for legalisation finds high support.



**Cannabis is a nutritious plant.  
Let's treat it like one.**

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# Brand new developments



Only last Friday, Austria's justice minister announced considerations to decriminalise small scale possession of cannabis and other substances.



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Details are not yet available.

All 6 parties in parliament have shifted their stance on a decriminalisation of medical cannabis and recreational cannabis to varying degrees since the legalisation in Colorado.

Online polls show 4 out of 5 Austrians support legal cannabis, especially for medical reasons.



**Full legalisation could improve Austria's budget to the tune of €500 million in the 1st year already.**

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# Citizen's Parliamentary Initiative to legalise Cannabis is 3rd most successful ever

So far, almost 30,000 Austrians have signed a citizen's initiative that aims for a complete legalisation of cannabis



Cannabis may become a topic in future elections and even drive voter participation among the young.

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# Until then...



- Cannabis patients growing their own supply are still under threat of a criminal conviction
- ++ Home-growing of Cannabis has reduced organised crime in the cannabis market that is now dominated by small scale gardeners (<20 plants)
- ++ Product quality has overall markedly improved



**Medical cannabis is a most urgent issue.  
Help end the needless suffering of the  
weakest in society: the sick**

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