

GP in cannabis plea for patients

REBECCA DIGIROLAMO

AN Adelaide GP is urging her peers to better support medicinal cannabis, as new figures show South Australian doctors have the lowest prescription rates of all mainland states.

Therapeutic Goods Administration data obtained by the *Sunday Mail* reveals SA has the lowest per capita rate of TGA exemptions, which allow doctors to prescribe unregistered medicinal cannabis products.

SA doctors were granted 530 exemptions to prescribe medicinal cannabis from 2016, when it was legalised, up to February 29 this year.

Adelaide GP Carolyn Harris has urged doctors to give medicinal cannabis a fair go after her son, Liam, 17, went from suffering 100 seizures a day to one a week, after using cannabis oil for the past year.

It took Dr Harris more than a year to find an SA doctor willing to prescribe Liam medicinal cannabis in a bid to stop seizures further damaging his brain development.

"His quality of life and his general wellbeing has dramatically improved," Dr Harris said.

Liam is among three Austra-



THE STATS

TGA prescription exemptions for medicinal cannabis, 2016 to Feb 29 this year - total and per capita

Qld.....	14,509 (0.28)
NSW	9449 (0.15)
VIC	7292 (0.11)
WA	2688 (0.10)
SA	530 (0.03)
ACT	197 (0.05)
TAS	25 (0.004)
NT	under 25 (0.008)

FRUSTRATED: Carolyn Harris and Liam. Picture MATT TURNER

lian children living with a rare genetic disorder due to a CHD2 gene code mutation. He had trialled several traditional medications without success.

"It's frustrating that as parent and a medical professional, who is conservative by nature and had done extensive research, that I have had to plead, almost beg, for doctors to help treat my son with a natural drug that can help when all else has failed," Dr Harris said.

She said the legal approval process for medicinal cannabis through the TGA was difficult, time-consuming, costly and re-

liant on GP support for successful uptake. A pharmacy in Adelaide's eastern suburbs is aiming to improve access to the drug and reduce costs through an alternative, legal path.

The Green Dispensary Compounding Pharmacy has a license to handle and prepare medicinal cannabis that is individually created for a patient by an approved pharmacist on a doctor's prescription, without TGA approval required.

Pharmacist Antony Condina said we want patients to have easier access to more cost-effective options.