The University of Queensland Union College
Drugs Other Than Alcohol Policy and Procedure

Statement of Commitment

Union College is committed to being a safe environment for emerging adults to live, study and grow. We are committed to providing an environment that is inclusive, education-oriented and supportive.

Introduction

Union College acknowledges that our residents are at a period of growth, change and exploration as they emerge into young adults. However, Union College maintains the prohibition of illicit substances. The use of drugs can affect your health, judgement, and safety, as well as the safety of others, and your capacity to participate in and succeed in higher education.

Purpose

We want Union College to be a safe, healthy and respectful place to live and learn, where you can focus on your studies and life without exposure to avoidable harm. This policy explains how we manage smoking, vaping, illicit drugs and the misuse of prescription and other substances within our community.

We:

- Prohibit the use, possession, sale or supply of illegal substances on our premises and at any college-related event
- Prohibit the misuse, diversion, sale or supply of prescription medications and other substances, such as nitrous oxide
- Operate on the principle that adult community members are responsible for what they consume, but that this responsibility is subject to a legal and regulatory framework and our duty of care to you and others.

Drug use or misuse does not reduce your personal responsibility to comply with the Resident Code of Conduct, the Addressing Concerns and Complaints Policy, and other Union College policies.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All residents of Union College
- All staff, contractors and volunteers
- All visitors and guests on college grounds, and
- Anyone attending or participating in college events and activities on and off campus.

Everyone covered by this policy is responsible for knowing and following it, as well as for their own behaviour.

This policy covers illicit drugs, misuse of prescription medications, vaping, and smoking. Alcohol is managed under a separate policy - see our Responsible Consumption of Alcohol Policy. Lawfully prescribed medicinal cannabis, prescribed by an authorised medical practitioner under therapeutic access schemes, is addressed within this policy.

Strategic and legislative context

We align this policy with:

- The Australian Universities Accord's vision of a higher education system that supports student safety, wellbeing and success, including in student accommodation
- The Action Plan Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education expects student accommodation providers to adopt a whole-of-organisation approach to safety and to manage environmental and situational risks, including those linked to substance use

We comply with all relevant Commonwealth and Queensland legislation and regulations, including:

- Drugs, poisons and controlled substances laws that prohibit possession, supply and trafficking of illegal drugs
- Queensland's Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Vaping) Amendment Bill 2024 and related laws tightly regulate nicotine-containing vaping products, making most consumer products illegal. Therapeutic vapes with ≤20 mg/mL nicotine may be accessed by adults through pharmacies after consultation, while higher strengths require a prescription
- Work Health and Safety laws that require us to manage drug-related risks to health and safety
- Criminal and public order laws that apply to drug-related conduct.

All activities at Union College must comply with these laws and with our policies and procedures.

We operate on the core principles of safety, wellbeing and harm minimisation.

We recognise that:

- Using illegal drugs or misusing prescription medications can seriously affect decision-making, physical and mental health, personal safety and academic participation
- Substance use can increase the risk of violence, including gender-based and sexual violence, and can make it harder or impossible for you or others to give consent, protect yourself, or support friends.

Our primary priority will always be your safety and the safety of others. We use a harm-minimisation approach that:

- Addresses any immediate risk to life or safety first
- Encourages early help-seeking and access to support services

- Uses fair and proportionate behaviour management responses where needed to protect the community and uphold our standards.

We address reports and incidents in accordance with our Addressing Concerns and Complaints Policy and the Resident Code of Conduct, and we cooperate with the Queensland Police Service (QPS) and other authorities as required or when serious risks are present.

Medicinal Cannabis

We recognise that medicinal cannabis is now a legitimate treatment option in Australia and Queensland, and that some residents may be prescribed it as part of their health care.

We comply with all relevant Commonwealth and Queensland laws and regulations. In summary:

- Recreational cannabis remains illegal in Queensland and most of Australia. Possession, use, cultivation and sale of cannabis for non-medical purposes are criminal offences. There is no legal way to access recreational cannabis in Queensland, and it is prohibited on our campus and at all college-related activities.
- Medicinal cannabis has been legal in Australia since 2016 under tightly controlled schemes, including in Queensland under similar conditions. Authorised doctors can prescribe medicinal cannabis products for specific medical conditions, subject to Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and state health requirements.

Medicinal cannabis products:

- Must be prescribed by an authorised medical practitioner, often via the TGA Special Access or Authorised Prescriber Schemes
- Must be supplied through legal channels, such as approved pharmacies
- Is produced under strict quality controls with known concentrations of active ingredients
- Is usually supplied as oils, capsules, sprays, tinctures or other pharmaceutical forms, and taken orally or sublingually rather than smoked
- May have psychoactive effects depending on the product and dose
- Are regulated pharmaceutical-grade products with known and consistent concentrations of cannabinoids, such as THC and CBD.

You must comply with both Commonwealth and state laws, as well as our policies, when you use, possess, or transport medicinal cannabis.

If you are prescribed medicinal cannabis and wish to use it while living at Union College, you must:

- Obtain a valid prescription from a doctor authorised under the TGA Special Access Scheme or the Authorised Prescriber Scheme, or an equivalent

- Ensure the product you use is lawfully prescribed and supplied in compliance with TGA and Queensland Health requirements
- Store and use on campus in alignment with this policy and all other policies
- Use the product only as prescribed and do not use any other cannabis products on campus.
- Advise the college immediately and provide medical certification.

We strongly encourage you to:

- Inform the Resident Wellbeing Lead that you have a medicinal cannabis prescription so we can support you and ensure your use is managed safely in a communal environment. This information will be handled sensitively and in line with privacy and confidentiality principles
- Discuss any concerns about side effects, interactions with other medications, or impacts on your study with your doctor and, if relevant, with student support services.

To protect your privacy and safety, and to prevent diversion or misuse, you must:

- Store your medicinal cannabis securely in your room, ideally in a locked drawer, box or safe, in line with any directions from your prescriber or pharmacist
- Keep your medication out of sight and out of reach of visitors and other residents
- Never share, lend, sell or give your medicinal cannabis to anyone else under any circumstances, even if they claim to have similar symptoms
- Notify Queensland Police Service and the Deputy Head of College/Deputy CEO immediately if your medicinal cannabis is lost or stolen.

Sharing or supplying medicinal cannabis to others may breach criminal law and will be treated as serious misconduct under our Resident Code of Conduct and related policies.

Smoking and vaping

Union College and the wider UQ campus are smoke-free environments.

We support you if you are trying to stop or reduce smoking or vaping, and we set clear limits to protect others from harm caused by smoke and aerosols.

- Smoking is only permitted in the designated area on Upland Road at the front of campus, the team at Reception or your RMs can direct you to this location.
- You must not smoke, including medicinal cannabis, in your room, in any building, or in any indoor or outdoor public space on campus, except in the designated smoking area.
- The University of Queensland campuses are smoke-free, and we expect you to respect these rules while on UQ grounds.

Vaping and electronic cigarettes:

- Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes, vapes, vape pens, e-cigars, personal vapourisers) and nicotine-containing products are generally illegal for retail sale in Queensland, except when supplied as therapeutic vapes under health regulations.
- Adults aged 18 and over may access therapeutic vapes with nicotine ≤20 mg/mL from pharmacies without a prescription after consultation; stronger products require a prescription.
- You must not use, possess, supply, or sell illegal vaping products on campus or at college-sanctioned events.

We may act under this policy and other college policies if you breach these requirements.

Illegal drugs, prescription medications and other substances

We:

- Prohibit the use, possession, cultivation, manufacture, sale or supply of illegal drugs by any resident, staff member or visitor on our premises or at any college event
- Prohibit the non-medical use, misuse, diversion, sale or supply of prescription medications and other substances (for example, nitrous oxide)
- Consider the sale or supply of illegal drugs or prescription medications by a resident to be serious misconduct that will result in referral to QPS, and may result in immediate suspension or possible expulsion.

Reports of the above will be addressed under the Addressing Concerns and Complaints Policy.

If your doctor prescribes medication, we understand this is private information. You must:

- Keep medications in a locked box or drawer in your room
- Keep details of your medications private, and share them only with other residents or visitors who are directly supporting you with your medical condition
- Consider informing the Resident Wellbeing Lead so we can support you appropriately. This information will be kept confidential in line with our privacy obligations
- Report theft or loss of your medications to us and to QPS immediately.

Seeking help and support

We encourage you to seek support as soon as possible if you are concerned about your own use of drugs, smoking or vaping, or about a friend. Talking early about concerns is a sign of strength, not weakness.

You can:

- Speak to the Resident Wellbeing Lead, Deputy Head of College/Deputy CEO or another trusted staff member

- Ask for help to contact external services, including:
    - Alcohol and Drug Support QLD (Adis) – 1800 177 833 (confidential advice and counselling)
    - Headspace
    - The University of Queensland counselling services
    - QUT and Griffith University counselling and wellbeing services
    - Emergency services (police, ambulance) – 000
    - Non-urgent police – 131 444
    - Legal Aid Queensland
    - Drug Arm.

We handle these conversations sensitively and, wherever possible, confidentially. However, if we believe there is a serious risk to you or others, we may need to act to keep people safe and to comply with the law.

Responding to incidents and concerns

If you are concerned that someone is in immediate danger due to drugs or other substances (for example, they are unconscious, having a seizure, struggling to breathe or severely confused), you must:

- Call 000 for emergency services, and
- Contact a staff member or the duty phone immediately.

If there is no immediate emergency, but you suspect that a resident is:

- Using, possessing or being supplied illegal substances, or
- Misusing, selling or supplying prescription medications or other substances,
- In danger directly or indirectly due to the above,

you should notify the Resident Wellbeing Lead or Deputy Head of College/Deputy CEO as soon as possible.

When we receive information about suspected drug use, possession or dealing, we will:

- Assess the immediate safety of the person and others and take any urgent protective steps
- Offer support to those directly affected, including referral to health and counselling services
- Decide whether the matter needs to be reported to QPS or other authorities, considering the seriousness of the behaviour and our legal obligations
- Decide whether to impose interim measures to protect others (for example, restricting access to specific areas, changing room allocations, or temporarily suspending a resident from the college)

- Decide on next steps under our Addressing Concerns and Complaints Policy and Resident Code of Conduct.

Residents found:

- Selling or dealing illegal substances, or
- Coercing or pressuring others to take illegal substances

will be reported to QPS. This behaviour will result in immediate suspension from residence while we investigate, and, if the allegations are substantiated, you may face expulsion. The Head of College/CEO may ask QPS to search areas of the College if there is sufficient evidence of drug use on campus.

Visitors who use, sell or supply illegal substances on campus will be instructed to leave, banned from returning, and reported to QPS.

We will use our behaviour management processes, guided by procedural fairness and our obligations under the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence, when drug-related conduct intersects with safety, harassment or violence concerns.

Links to safety, gender-based violence and wellbeing

We recognise that:

- Substance use can increase the risk of accidents, injuries, self-harm, exploitation and gender-based violence, including sexual assault and harassment
- Some students and staff, including First Nations people, people with disabilities, LGBTIQA+ people and international students, may face higher risks and additional barriers to seeking help.

Therefore, we:

- Expect you and your fellow residents to manage events, parties and social gatherings in ways that do not encourage or normalise drug use or risky behaviour
- Integrate messages on drug-related risk and harm minimisation into our broader education on consent, respectful relationships and bystander action
- Ensure our responses to incidents are trauma-informed, victim-survivor-centred where harm has occurred, and consistent with our gender-based violence actions and obligations.

Educative focus and community responsibility

We are a learning community. Our approach to drugs other than alcohol is not purely disciplinary; it is also educative and supportive. We will:

- Provide you with accessible information on the health and legal risks of drug use and misuse
- Promote harm-minimisation strategies and safer choices
- Encourage peer support and early help-seeking

- Use data and feedback to refine our education and prevention work in line with the Universities Accord's emphasis on evidence-informed, student-centred practice.

At the same time, everyone has a shared responsibility to keep the community safe by:

- Following this policy and other college policies
- Looking out for each other and acting when something does not feel right
- Reporting serious concerns to staff promptly.

Drug or substance misuse may increase risk factors for gender-based violence, sexual misconduct and other harms. Where drug use intersects with allegations of sexual misconduct or gender-based violence, investigations will apply to both this policy and our Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy.

Substance use may also impair consent capacity, as addressed in our Responsible Consumption of Alcohol Policy and Gender Based Violence and Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy.

Any breaches of this policy are also breaches of the Resident Code of Conduct and will be managed through procedures in our Addressing Concerns and Complaints Policy.

Review and continuous improvement

We review this policy at least annually, alongside the Resident Handbook and related policies, to ensure it:

- Reflects current law, including any changes to Commonwealth and state legislation on drugs, tobacco, vaping, medicines and student safety
- Aligns with the Australian Universities Accord, the Action Plan Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education and the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence
- Continues to meet best-practice standards for student safety, wellbeing and harm minimisation.

Document Number: POL002
Topic: Cigarettes, vaping, cannabis and other drugs on campus
Approval Authority: Head of College & CEO
Last Approval Date: January 2026
Review Date: December 2027 (or earlier to reflect legislative or regulatory changes)
Audience: Current and future residents, parents and carers, Union College workers and Board, key stakeholders and regulators