

Since the UK government rescheduled cannabis-based medicines in 2018, there's [individual funding request nhs](#) been a lot of interest — and misinformation — about what patients can expect from NHS prescribing. One question I hear all the time is whether there's a single **NHS list of approved medical cannabis products** that doctors can freely prescribe, much like there is for other prescription drugs.

In this post, I'll break down exactly what the 2018 rescheduling changed, NHS rules on prescribing specialist-only cannabis medicines, the tricky issue of unlicensed cannabis-based products, and most importantly, the difference between *legal prescribing* and *NHS funding*. To help you navigate this complex topic, I'll also point you to helpful resources like [medicalcannabis.co.uk](#), a clinic directory, and the [Releaf UK explainer page](#) for further reading.

What Did the 2018 Rescheduling of Cannabis-Based Medicines Change?

Back in November 2018, the UK government reclassified cannabis-based products for medicinal use from a Schedule 1 drug — meaning “no recognized medicinal value” — to Schedule 2. This reclassification meant that specialist doctors could legally **prescribe cannabis-based medicines** in the UK.

- Before 2018: Cannabis-derived medicines like Sativex and Epidyolex were off-limits on the NHS and for private prescription, except in extremely rare cases through individual license routes.
- After 2018: Specialist doctors gained legal ability to prescribe cannabis-based products as part of normal treatment following established prescription rules.

In plain English: *doctors became legally allowed to prescribe medical cannabis products for certain conditions as long as they followed proper prescribing guidelines.*

NHS Prescribing Guidance on Cannabis: Is There an Official 'Approved List'?

Unlike many medicines, there isn't a single “NHS list of approved medical cannabis products” that general practitioners or even all specialists can simply consult. Here's why:

1. **Medical cannabis products are mostly unlicensed medicines.** This means they don't have the usual product licences you see with other medicines regulated by the MHRA.
2. **NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) has not (yet) issued comprehensive Technology Appraisals for most cannabis-based products,** so formal nationwide NHS prescribing guidance is limited.
3. **Prescribing is limited to specialist doctors** with expertise in the condition being treated – not GPs — and typically in secondary care settings.

In fact, for the vast majority of cannabis medicines, NHS England has stated it will not routinely fund prescriptions until further evidence is available and appraisals are completed. As a result, doctors who want to prescribe cannabis-based products do so on an individual basis and often privately for the foreseeable future.

How does NHS England currently approach cannabis-based medicines?

NHS England published a policy stating it will allow cannabis-based medicinal products to be prescribed but only by “appropriate specialists” in complex cases where other standard treatments have failed. They emphasise **specialist-only prescribing rules** to ensure treatment is well managed.



Because of limited formal approvals and unclear evidence on cost-effectiveness, NHS England's position results in:

- Doctors can prescribe but do so cautiously and usually only after exhausting licensed treatment options.
- The NHS generally does *not* routinely fund these prescriptions yet — so patients usually face paying privately or seeking alternative routes.
- There is no central 'NHS cannabis formulary' listing products authorised or routinely funded for direct NHS prescription.

Legal Prescribing vs NHS Funding: What's the Difference?

It's vital to separate two concepts often confused in public discussion:

- **Legal prescribing:** Doctors in the UK can legally prescribe cannabis medicines under specific conditions, following the 2018 rescheduling.
- **NHS funding:** Whether the NHS will pay for the medicine under the NHS system, which depends on clinical evidence, cost-effectiveness, and NICE technology appraisals.

You could have a medicine that is legal to prescribe but not routinely funded by the NHS. This is the current state for almost all cannabis-based medicines. As a result:

- Patients often need to pay privately for prescriptions from specialist clinics, or
- Prescribers may only recommend cannabis-based medicines when all else fails, and approval for NHS funding is sought case-by-case.

For those exploring private treatment, medicalcannabis.co.uk offers a handy directory and comparison tool for private clinics specialising in medical cannabis prescribing.

Note on prices: At the time of writing, no authoritative, official NHS price lists for cannabis medicines exist. Prices vary widely between private providers, product types, and dosages. If future sources quote specific prices, I will ensure exact quotes and evidence are clearly attributed.



What About Unlicensed Cannabis-Based Medicines?

One of the biggest challenges with medical cannabis is the prevalence of *unlicensed cannabis-based medicines*. Unlike authorised medicines that have a product licence confirming their safety, quality, and efficacy, unlicensed products do not have this full regulatory approval.

Why does this matter?

- Unlicensed products are often prescribed “off-label” or as special imports, raising questions about consistency and quality assurance.
- The NHS generally approaches unlicensed cannabis medicines with caution due to lack of robust evidence and standardized dosing.
- Many specialist prescribers require careful patient monitoring and detailed clinical justification before opting for unlicensed cannabis products.

This cautious stance means that for patients hoping to get cannabis-based treatments on the NHS, **expect delays and limited availability**, especially for unlicensed products. Private clinics tend to offer more options, but at private cost.

Summary: What Should Patients Know About NHS Cannabis Prescribing?

Key Point Explanation 2018 rescheduling Allowed specialist doctors to legally prescribe cannabis-based medicines in the UK under established prescribing rules. No single NHS approved list Unlike other medicines, there is no single NHS formulary or list of approved cannabis products due to mostly unlicensed status and lack of NICE appraisals. Specialist-only prescribing Only designated specialists can prescribe cannabis medicines. GPs cannot initiate these prescriptions. Legal prescribing ≠ NHS funding Prescribing cannabis medicines is legal, but NHS England does not routinely fund them; patients often pay privately. Unlicensed cannabis medicines These require extra caution, monitoring, and justification; NHS access to unlicensed products is limited.

Where to Get More Information?

If you're considering medical cannabis and want to explore your options, these are reliable starting points:

- medicalcannabis.co.uk – Comprehensive clinic directory and comparison of private UK clinics prescribing cannabis-based medicines.
- Releaf UK – Educational resource that explains medical cannabis terminology, prescribing rules, and patient access.
- NICE guidance – Keep an eye out here for any future *Technology Appraisals* in UK that may recommend or appraise cannabis medicines.

Final Thoughts

So, is there a single NHS list of approved medical cannabis products? The short answer is **no**. While cannabis-based medicines are legal to prescribe by specialists, there's no central NHS formulary like there is for many licensed medicines. The NHS also does not currently routinely fund these treatments, leaving most patients to explore private prescribing routes or individual funding requests.

Remember: if you're considering medical cannabis, check whether your prescriber is a recognised specialist and understand that unlicensed products bring extra clinical caution. Always double-check the legitimacy of clinics and information sources, and be wary of marketing claims not backed by NICE or NHS policies.