

Media Release

Friday 8 April 2022

Hospital Pharmacists essential to clearing Victorian elective surgery backlog amid \$1.5b investment

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) has welcomed the Victorian Government's announcement of \$1.5b to address the backlog of elective surgery waitlists built up during the COVID-19 pandemic, while cautioning the need to also bolster the expert Hospital Pharmacist workforce required to ensure safety is maintained.

Announced by Acting Premier James Merlino last Sunday, the investment aims to ensure the number of elective surgeries carried out in Victorian hospitals will increase to 125 per cent of pre-pandemic levels, with an additional 40,000 elective surgeries to be carried out in 2023, building up to 240,000 annually from 2024.

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels welcomed the investment as vital to closing gaps in service delivery in Victoria's hospitals and addressing longstanding elective surgery waitlists.

'As well as continuing to provide specialised COVID-19 medicines to hospital patients and deliver vaccines in state-run vaccination clinics, our Hospital Pharmacists understand standard care must continue and Victoria's elective surgery waitlist has grown 60% since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and now exceeds 80,000 patients.

'SHPA has supported the [Australian Medical Association's campaign to Clear The Hospital Logjam](#), and echoes concerns from our medical colleagues that hospital staff including our crucial Hospital Pharmacists, are exhausted, experiencing higher levels of burnout and stress.'

Ms Michaels says part of the \$1.5b investment funding needs to be directed toward embedding more Surgery and Perioperative Medicine Hospital Pharmacists into multidisciplinary teams.

'After giving so much over the past two years, we cannot ask our Hospital Pharmacists to do more without extra workforce investment. The \$1.5b package must include funding for Surgery and Perioperative Medicine Hospital Pharmacists to improve medicines management and reduce incidence of serious medication errors for surgical patients, who are administered numerous high-risk medicines.

'Hospital Pharmacists carry out pre-surgery medication reviews, ensuring potentially fatal drug interactions are avoided. Post-surgery, Hospital Pharmacists counsel patients on their medication plans which typically include high-risk medicines such as post-operative anticoagulants and opioid pain medicines.

'The Victorian Government must work with Victorian hospitals and health services to ensure staffing ratios of one Hospital Pharmacist for every 15-20 surgical patients is met, as per SHPA's [Standard of practice in surgery and perioperative medicine for pharmacy services](#) which was published last month.

Ms Michaels says surgical patients are at high risk of re-admission due to the new and high-risk medicines they are prescribed post-surgery.

'In Australia there are 250,000 medication-related hospital admissions each year.

'Ensuring there are commensurate Hospital Pharmacists to support this ambitious and much-needed investment to clear elective surgery waitlists is essential to keep patients safe at home and empowered to manage their new medicines regimen safely, minimising their risk of returning to hospital.'

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About SHPA

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is the national, professional, for-purpose organisation for 6,300+ Hospital Pharmacists, and their Hospital Pharmacist Intern and Hospital Pharmacy Technician colleagues working across Australia's health system, advocating for their pivotal role improving the safety and quality of medicines use. Embedded in multidisciplinary medical teams and equipped with exceptional medicines management expertise, SHPA members are progressive advocates for clinical excellence, committed to evidence-based practice and passionate about patient care.

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