

Media release

Tuesday 20 December 2022

SHPA strongly supports updated National Medicines Policy, calls for safe, equitable meds access

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) strongly supports the first [update to Australia's National Medicines Policy \(NMP\)](#) in more than 20 years, affirming the need to resource equitable and affordable medicines access and care that meets patient need, regardless of location or care setting.

SHPA President Tom Simpson reiterated the organisation's support for the NMP's first pillar on equitable and timely access at affordable cost.

'When the NMP was first established in 2000, there was no overlap between our public hospitals and the PBS; now our hospital pharmacies in public and private settings are custodians of nearly one quarter of annual PBS expenditure.

'Hospital pharmacists and technicians play an increasingly crucial role ensuring all Australians have fair, timely, reliable and affordable access to high-quality medicines and medicines services. Newer medicines and technologies are increasingly complex, which are used exclusively in or initiated in hospital settings due to their specialised nature.

'As cost-of-living pressures continue, we again welcome the Australian Government's reduction of the general Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) co-payment to \$30 from 1 January 2023, which will help ensure Australians take the medicines they need to keep them well, mitigating preventable hospitalisation and harm.

'There are 250,000 medicine-related hospital admissions and 400,000 medicine-related emergency department presentations each year, and SHPA members are on the frontline delivering urgent care when this harm occurs.'

Mr Simpson welcomed the announcement by Health Minister Mark Butler MP that the NMP will be updated every five years, focusing on equitable care that meets patient need, regardless of location.

'For this to be truly equitable, we reiterate our call for New South Wales and the ACT to sign up to Pharmaceutical Reform Agreements – as included in current ACT Health strategies and recommended at recent inquiries in NSW – to close gaps and remove delays in patients receiving medicines as they leave hospital, which is essential for quality, safe, continuous care.

'This is particularly pertinent with the current GP shortage crisis which is a grave risk to a safe transition of care for patients, and puts them at risk of readmission without enough medicines on discharge and being unable to see their GP in a timely manner.

'On behalf of our members, who are dedicated to patient-centred and team-based care, SHPA agrees with a central message of the update policy, that "the location of care delivery should not impact safe access to medicines".

'Whether this is in different jurisdictions, or in different settings such as hospitals, primary care, disability care, residential aged care or correctional settings, we strongly believe arbitrary funding rules around location of care or patient status should not impede access and care.'

'The COVID-19 pandemic has also further transformed healthcare delivery and blurred the lines of what a hospital is, with innovative, virtual and outreach services expanding even more to truly realise principles of patient-centred care.'

Mr Simpson said as centres of medicines excellence, hospitals provide fertile ground for advancing pharmacist and technician expertise to benefit Australia's national medicines ecosystem.

'Hospital-based or hospital-informed training creates practitioners whose native habitat is multidisciplinary, collaborative care, surrounded by specialists and generalists from all healthcare professions.'

'Proven initiatives such as Foundation and Advanced Training Residencies provide generalist and specialist knowledge to excel in emerging, onsite roles, particularly in aged care and GP practices, while ensuring greater pharmacist coverage and medicines safety in regional, rural and remote areas, an ever-present concern in our vast country.'

'We look forward to partnering with government, health care, pharmacy and educational stakeholders to deliver on the promise of the NMP: ensuring truly equitable and timely access to medicines at affordable cost, keeping Australians healthy and safe closer to home.'

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About SHPA

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is the national, professional organisation for the 6,100+ 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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