

Media release

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Medicines supply key to opening COVID-safe economy

The critical need to safeguard medicines supply, as part of Australia's national response to coronavirus, is appropriately reflected in its listing as one of 15 key triggers for the [progressive shift toward a 'COVID-safe economy'](#), the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) has said today.

As one of seven measures to ensure adequate health system capacity, SHPA has welcomed the listing of 'stocks of healthcare consumables' as a key metric – identified by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee and endorsed by the National Cabinet – to support decision making on the relaxation of restriction measures.

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says Australia's expanded ICU capacity is only ready for use if key medicines to treat patients with acute COVID-19 symptoms are also available.

'Australians watched with concern as Italy, then Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States grappled with dangerous shortages of basic personal protective equipment (PPE) and ventilators for their intensive care beds, so it is understandable these key items pulled focus in March and early April.

'What is now clear in the national conversation, as reiterated through SHPA's advocacy on behalf of members around the country, is that if COVID-19 cases surge, expanded ICU capacity can only be operationalised if the supply of essential medicines is secure.

'This is even more important if hospitals see a return to pre-coronavirus levels of elective surgeries, and for rural and remote hospitals that experience more frequent shortages at the best of times.'

Ms Michaels says increasing appreciation for the complexities around Australia's medicines supply chains is welcome.

'Through our weekly COVID-19 Hospital Pharmacy Capacity Snapshot surveys, we see great variability in medicines supply security between states and territories, between different sized hospitals and between metropolitan and regional sites, but the widespread uncertainty is only increasing as elective surgeries start up again.

'By closely tracking current or anticipated medicines shortages, the Therapeutic Goods Administration and the Department of Health are to be commended for their direct focus on this ongoing issue, and SHPA hopes lesson from the COVID-19 emergency will lead to ongoing reform in the interests of medicines safety and improving patient care.'

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About SHPA

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is the national, professional, for-purpose organisation for leading pharmacists and pharmacy technicians 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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