

Media release

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SHPA welcomes ongoing urgency to address opioid-related harm

Eight months after the release of its landmark [Reducing Opioid-related Harm report](#), the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) has welcomed a new awareness campaigns from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) aimed at curbing the growing incidence of harm caused by opioid-containing products in the Australian community.

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says the TGA's ['Return Your Opioids'](#) initiative centres on important messages that will resonate with hospital pharmacists across the country.

'In caring for Australia's most acutely unwell, hospital pharmacists oversee more than 20% of annual PBS expenditure, including on high-risk opioids, and their expertise is essential to ensuring patients leave hospital equipped and empowered to manage their medicines regimen safely at home.

'The TGA's [#ReturnYourOpioids](#) campaign is powerful as it reminds Australians of the 100 daily hospitalisations and two-thirds of drug-related deaths that are linked to opioid misuse, data explored in detail in [SHPA's November 2018 report](#) and subsequent 33 recommendations for collaborative response.

'The core messages are also crucial: strong medicines should not be kept around "just in case" and the presence of these puts curious children and pets as well as adults, at risk.'

The campaign calls on people to return unneeded opioids to their local community pharmacy. Over the past twelve months, community pharmacists have collected more than 613,000 kg of unwanted medicines, according to the [Return Unwanted Medicines Project](#).

Ms Michaels says the warning regarding 'just in case' possession of opioid products must be repeated, to patient and healthcare audiences alike.

'In our *Reducing Opioid-Related Harm* report more than 70% of respondents reported that opioids were still provided to patients to take home "just in case", even when they had not been required in the prior 48 hours.

'In the subsequent recommendations, we urge the need to support the education of doctors and non-medical prescribers regarding appropriate opioid prescribing for patients pre-operatively, during admission and at discharge.

'We also advocate for clinicians to be supported to prescribe the smallest quantity of analgesics, including dispensing partial packs of analgesics where this is appropriate for the needs of the patient.'

Ms Michaels says that, as medicines experts working in acute settings, hospital pharmacists play a central role as a safeguard to reduce the risk of inappropriate medicine prescription, supply and use.

'SHPA and our members remain committed to partnering with stakeholders across health care and government to support better service provision and patient care and reverse the rising risk of opioid harm in the Australian community.'

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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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