

Media release

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Reform opportunities can maximise medicines funding through workforce investment

Marking 2021 World Pharmacists Day tomorrow, the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) calls for specific federal recognition and funding for hospital pharmacist expertise when supplying Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medicines, through upcoming reviews of the Pharmaceutical Reform Agreement and the National Medicines Policy, given the significant health care changes since their formation two decades ago.

SHPA President Peter Fowler says hospital pharmacy input is essential to the reviews of the two 20-year old policies that shape how medicines are funded and paid for, and ensure they are provided safely and effectively to Australians who need them.

'In 2001, the PBS was one-third of its current size, most listed medicines were used for the management of lifestyle-related diseases, and hospital pharmacists did not play a role in its financial sustainability.

'Today, a large proportion of new medicines approved for subsidy are much more complex, carry higher costs and are overwhelmingly used or initiated in hospitals due to the serious nature of the conditions being treated. As a result of this, and six jurisdictions signing up to Pharmaceutical Reform Agreements which enabled the supply of PBS medicines in hospitals, hospital pharmacists manage 23% of what is now a significantly larger annual PBS expenditure.'

Mr Fowler says pharmacy is the only healthcare profession in Australia that ties the provision of clinical services to the value of the medicine prescribed.

'This is ethically inconsistent with the purpose of the policies under review, especially given growing awareness of the benefits of deprescribing – often initiated in hospitals or by hospital pharmacists working in other settings – as an intervention that can improve quality of life.

'As a top priority, these reviews must place the patient at the centre of reform and fund clinical services separately.'

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says 2021 World Pharmacists Day is more about reflecting and looking forward than the celebrations of previous years.

'Hospital pharmacists, technicians and their peers have been under immense pressure since the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia, but have performed incredibly well in strained and constrained environments.

'The national roadmap out of heavy COVID-19 restrictions and the concurrent medicines policy reviews provide an opportunity to prepare the pipeline of pharmacist expertise we need over the coming decades.

'On World Pharmacists Day we call for greater investment from all levels of government in our next generation workforce, who are coming through with advanced literacy in the management of increasingly complex medicines. There are too many Australian hospital wards today that do not have a clinical pharmacist at the bedside, making sure medicines use is safe and not harmful to the patient.'

'Put simply, this means decoupling funding for medicines and funding for the unique expertise to safely deliver them. The benefits are innumerable and the costs are already too high.'

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For more information contact:

Susie Brown, Communications and Media Advisor

sbrown@shpa.org.au | 0437 119 286

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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