



## **SHPA ACT Branch submission to ACT Government Budget 2024-2025 consultation, March 2024**

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.

SHPA ACT Branch Committee welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the ACT Government 2024-2025 Budget consultation. ACT Health is currently amid major transformations with expanding healthcare infrastructure and services to accommodate the increasing complexity and health needs of Canberrans. The Canberra Hospital Expansion project, which is nearing its completion this year, is set to deliver a new Emergency Department and a new and improved Intensive Care Unit with 147 spaces, a further 156 inpatient beds, and 22 operating theatres.<sup>1</sup>

The Hospital Pharmacy workforce in ACT has also seen a vast improvement in staff culture and workplace wellbeing under the strong leadership of the current Directors of Pharmacy, delivering a positive growth in the hospital pharmacy workforce in recent years. ACT Health currently has 17 hospital pharmacists undertaking SHPA's Resident Training Program, with 18 pharmacists having completed it. This is an exciting growth from 2023 where at the time there were eight hospital pharmacists completed and 15 hospital pharmacists completing SHPA's Resident training program. This growth also contributed to pharmacists being credentialled to deliver Partnered Pharmacist Medication Charting (PPMC) services, and the implementation of Tech-Check-Tech, creating capacity in the workforce and delivery of skilled services.

With current and future drive for continued expansion in both health services and infrastructure in line with the strategic vision of the *ACT Health Services Plan 2022-2030*<sup>2</sup>, it is crucial that appropriate investments are made to support the growth in the ACT Health workforce to continue the delivery of quality and timely health services to all Canberrans. Providing funding for workforce development is also essential in supporting staff wellbeing, which overall contributes to workforce sustainability.

The ACT Health workforce is currently at capacity and requires investment to meet the growing demands of healthcare in ACT. Of note, the immediate opening of the new hospital, which will see a new emergency department and intensive care unit as well as a myriad of new clinical services, will require adequate staffing to ensure safe clinical practice and minimise potential issues such as ambulance ramping and bed block. The medical workforce has also expressed keen interest for more hospital pharmacists to address capacity issues and to promote safe and timely medicines access in line with the principles of the *National Medicines Policy*<sup>3</sup>.



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To ensure the sustainability of the ACT Health workforce in delivering quality health services for Canberrans, SHPA ACT Branch Committee, chaired by Carman Chan, recommends:

1. **Provide further investment into four additional hospital pharmacy internships** to strengthen the pipeline of hospital pharmacists, securing a sustainable workforce capable of delivering quality care.

Cost of investment: ~\$370,000 per annum to fund an additional four hospital pharmacy interns across Canberra Health Services and North Canberra Hospital.

2. **Implement Registrar Training Programs by funding 19 Registrar Training Program pharmacist positions in ACT Health** to continue producing a highly skilled pharmacy workforce with structured career pathways, supporting workforce retention and sustainability.

Cost of investment: \$2.3 million per annum to fund an additional 19 Hospital Pharmacy Registrars across Canberra Health Services and North Canberra Hospital, to support specialisation of hospital pharmacists in addressing the increasing demand and complexity of healthcare in ACT.

3. **Provide funding of a ward-based pharmacy technician-led 'Bedside Medication Management' Project across ACT public hospitals** to improve medication supply and nursing time productivity.

Cost of investment: ~\$460,000 per annum to fund five hospital technician positions for the implementation of BMM services in North Canberra Hospital, estimated to be recoverable in costs to nursing time.

4. **Become a signatory to the Pharmaceutical Reform Agreements** enabling PBS in hospitals to support safer discharges and transitions of care and ease reliance on primary healthcare systems.

If you have any queries or would like to discuss our submission further, please do not hesitate to contact Jerry Yik, Head of Policy and Advocacy on [jjyik@shpa.org.au](mailto:jjyik@shpa.org.au).



**Recommendation 1: Provide further investment into four additional hospital pharmacy internships to strengthen the pipeline of hospital pharmacists, securing a sustainable workforce capable of delivering quality care.**

The core principles of the *ACT Health Workforce Strategy 2023-2032*<sup>4</sup> outline the need to support a valued workforce highly skilled in providing high-quality, person-centred care, as well as sustainable healthcare delivery. To achieve this, SHPA recommends that the ACT government provides additional investment in ACT hospital pharmacy internships to strengthen the internal pipeline of the growing hospital pharmacy workforce and improve workforce retention and sustainability.

ACT hospital pharmacy departments frequently experience difficulties in employing and retaining hospital pharmacists across generalist and specialist positions due to the high demand for pharmacy expertise in clinical and non-clinical (including government) roles relative to the population. Currently there are five hospital pharmacy interns across Canberra Health Services and North Canberra Hospital, with interest from both health services in employing an additional four interns in total.

ACT hospital services report that 90% of all job applications for hospital pharmacist positions are received from the community pharmacy workforce. While there is an interest and appetite for training these pharmacists to develop the skills necessary to deliver quality care in hospitals, ACT hospitals at current state are at capacity to provide training for untrained pharmacist whilst juggling with their clinical workload. This creates a continuous cycle of hospitals employing pharmacists that do not have the correct skills to fully engage in their roles, combined with lack of resources to provide appropriate training and education, leading to job dissatisfaction and eventual loss of staff. It is therefore important to strengthen the internal pipeline of hospital pharmacists by making more hospital pharmacy internships available for pharmacy graduates and setting up career pathway entry points into hospital pharmacy. This must then be followed up with strategies to retain the trained workforce through structured training and career advancement pathways.

This workforce strategy has been effective in states such as Victoria, where hospital pharmacy internship positions are 60% funded by the state government. These intern positions have fostered stability and improvement in hospital pharmacy workforce and service development, with most hospital pharmacy interns finding gainful employment in the public sector following completion of their internship. According to the National Australian Pharmacy Students' Association (NAPSA), hospital pharmacy is the most desirable job setting with over 80% of pharmacy students wanting jobs in Hospital Pharmacy.

Hospital pharmacy interns not only contribute significantly to the efficient functioning of hospital pharmacies and alleviating workload pressures, but these interns also serve as integral contributors to the development and fortification of the hospital pharmacist workforce pipeline in ACT. The practical experiences they acquire during their internships foster clinical and operational skills, as well as providing a unique opportunity for mentorship and knowledge transfer within the pharmacy team, fostering a culture of continuous learning and professional growth.

In considering investment into additional hospital pharmacy internship opportunities, the ACT Government should also fully fund the costs of pharmacist educator positions, similar to what is provided in other jurisdictions such as Victoria. Clinical educators are paramount in ensuring the success of hospital pharmacy interns throughout their internship year. It is imperative to acknowledge that the capacity of hospital pharmacy departments to employ more interns is directly tied to the appropriate resourcing of clinical educators. Without sufficient investment in these educators, the expansion of intern programs becomes challenging, limiting the potential growth of the hospital pharmacist workforce.



Establishing a fully funded, state-wide hospital pharmacy internship program through the ACT Government for each intern position is fundamental to addressing immediate workload challenges, supporting the expansion of scope of existing hospital pharmacists, and overall providing a strategic investment in the future resilience and competence of the pharmacy workforce, in alignment with the vision of the *ACT Health Workforce Plan 2023-2032*<sup>2</sup>.

**Cost of investment:** ~\$370,000 per annum to fund an additional four hospital pharmacy interns across Canberra Health Services and North Canberra Hospital.



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## **Recommendation 2: Implement Registrar Training Programs by funding 19 Registrar Training Program pharmacist positions in ACT Health to continue producing a highly skilled pharmacy workforce with structured career pathways, supporting workforce retention and sustainability.**

As emphasised in the *ACT Health Services plan 2022-2030*<sup>2</sup>, ACT is facing increasing demand for health services with a growing and ageing population and increase in chronic and complex conditions in community. The importance of supporting a highly skilled workforce to address the complexity of healthcare in ACT is paramount to creating a resilient health workforce that can support safe and quality services.

To achieve this, SHPA recommends the ACT Government to implement SHPA's Registrar Training Programs to be widely available for hospital pharmacists in the ACT to continue producing a highly skilled pharmacy workforce with structured career pathways. At present, there are just two Registrar positions in ACT Health.

As previously noted, ACT Health has seen some success in the growth of hospital pharmacists completing or having completed SHPA's Resident Training Program, which is Australia's structured, formalised, supported and accredited national pharmacy training program. Unfortunately, ACT hospitals continue face hospital pharmacist retention issues due to lack of opportunities for specialisation and expansion into advanced pharmacy practice. SHPA members report that upon completion of the Resident Training Program, hospital pharmacists may move to other jurisdictions where they are offered positions to specialise through SHPA's Registrar Training Programs, resulting in loss of skilled pharmacists. For ACT Hospitals which currently lack a strong workforce of specialised hospital pharmacists, retention of highly skilled hospital pharmacists is challenging.

SHPA's Registrar Training Programs delivers a structured and accredited national training programs for hospital pharmacists wishing to advance their practice in a specialist area and develop their skills in accordance with *Advancing – Stage II (Consolidation Level) of the National Competency Standards Framework for Pharmacists in Australia 2016*<sup>5</sup>. Registrar Training Programs offer an accredited pathway for specialty development, with a variety of Practice Area Pathways.

With the anticipated opening of a new hospital in 2024 and plans to create more outpatient clinic services to strengthen preventative care in community in ACT Health, securing a highly skilled and advanced hospital pharmacy workforce is critical to in creating capacity and supporting the delivery of complex care. ACT Health's Directors of Pharmacy have identified that they are currently in need of 19 additional Registrar level hospital pharmacists to provide advanced pharmacy services in various specialties to support workforce development, capacity and retention, and meet the immediate health needs of Canberrans in the following Practice Area Pathways:

- Canberra Health Service (10 Registrar positions)
  - Mental Health, Critical Care, Surgery and Perioperative Medicine, Medication Safety, Emergency Medicine, Respiratory, Renal Medicine, Geriatric Medicine, 2 x Oncology and Haematology
- North Canberra Hospital (9 Registrar positions)
  - Palliative Care, Mental Health, Infectious Diseases, Critical Care, Surgery and Perioperative Medicine, Medication Safety, Leadership & Management, 2 x Education

As previously mentioned for the investment of hospital pharmacy internships, appropriate resourcing of clinical educators is key to ensuring the success of implementing structured, training programs. However, the current lack of staff and resources in ACT hospitals pose challenges in successfully training specialist pharmacists. SHPA therefore recommends that funding for clinical educators can be outsourced from other



jurisdictions to provide remote training and oversight, until ACT Health is able to build a pool of specialised pharmacists that can in turn train and educate the next cohort of Resident Pharmacists, creating a positive cycle of workforce retention and sustainability.

**Cost of investment:** \$2.3 million per annum to fund an additional 19 Hospital Pharmacy Registrars across Canberra Health Services and North Canberra Hospital, to support specialisation of hospital pharmacists in addressing the increasing demand and complexity of healthcare in ACT.



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### **Recommendation 3: Provide funding of a ward-based pharmacy technician-led 'Bedside Medication Management' Project across ACT public hospitals to improve medication supply and nursing time productivity.**

SHPA recommends that the ACT Government invests in the implementation and funding of a technician-led Bedside Medication Management (BMM) supply system in ACT hospitals. Canberra Health Services already utilise another technician led model called Tech-Check-Tech, which has seen success in supporting hospital pharmacists to increase their capacity to perform more clinical tasks.

In BMM, hospital pharmacy technicians are utilised to create workforce capacity through relieving nursing resources to increase their time spent in patient-facing roles and promote safer and cost-saving outcomes by through a dedicated quality use of medicines supply focus.

Ahead of the Tasmanian Health Service implementing the BMM model a few years ago, an evaluation conducted by KPMG for the Tasmanian Health Service concluded that Tasmanian nurses 'waste' over 1,526 hours each week on reactively managing medication orders and supply for inpatients, time which could have been spent on delivering direct patient care. Funding, however, is required to implement these hospital pharmacy technician-led services across ACT public hospitals.

The role of ward-based pharmacy technicians in the BMM model is to co-ordinate and streamline timely supply of medications, coordinate and maintain appropriate storage of medications, as well as to remove ceased and unwanted medications from patient care areas. This ensures cost-saving medication stock management at ward level, cost-savings by the return of unused medicines, timely supply of newly initiated medications, and reduces the risk of administration of expired or incorrect medications.

A study exploring missed doses on inpatient wards found that of the 1,947 medication administration episodes collected during the pre-implementation period, there were 23 omissions, resulting in an omission rate per medicine episode of 1.18%. Following implementation of a ward-based pharmacy technician, of the 2367 medication administration episodes, there were 7 omissions, resulting in an omission rate per medicine episode of 0.30%.<sup>6</sup>

Expanding technicians' scope of practice also aligns with action 13 of the *ACT Health Workforce Strategy 2023-2032*<sup>4</sup>, which recommends working with health practitioners to identify barriers to professions working to their top of scope, prioritising key areas of service demand and reform as identified by the *ACT Health Services Plan 2022-2030*<sup>2</sup>.

SHPA therefore recommends funding five CA3.A1 pharmacy technicians in the implementation of BMM in North Canberra Hospital to support the hospital pharmacy workforce as well as nursing capacity. This will help to immediately address the current pharmacy workforce retention issues in ACT with a stronger pharmacy technician workforce, creating capacity for both nursing and hospital pharmacists to perform more patient-facing, complex, clinical tasks, and optimising the utilisation of skilled professionals within ACT Health.

**Cost of investment:** ~\$460,000 per annum to fund five hospital technician positions for the implementation of BMM services in North Canberra Hospital, estimated to be recoverable in costs to nursing time.



#### **Recommendation 4: Become a signatory to the Pharmaceutical Reform Agreement (PRA) enabling PBS in hospitals to support safer discharges and transitions of care and ease reliance on primary healthcare systems.**

To meet the principle of equity for consumers and in aligning with the key recommendations of the recently released *Pharmaceutical Reform Agreement Review Report*<sup>7</sup>, SHPA recommends that the Commonwealth should make the PRAs a uniform policy in Australia and enter into a PRA with ACT. This would ensure a consistent standard of care for vulnerable patients who have just had a major health event requiring hospitalisation and reduces the need for individuals to immediately seek an appointment with their general practitioner on discharge from hospital to continue receiving vital medicines.

SHPA acknowledges that the ACT Government has previously approached the Commonwealth in the last two years to enter into a PRA, which would support the key visions of the *ACT Health Services Plan 2022-2030*<sup>2</sup>. PRAs in other jurisdictions have worked to achieve 'Ongoing access to medicines', Guiding Principle 10 of the *Guiding Principles to Achieve Continuity in Medication Management*<sup>8</sup> published in 2022. They have supported the continuity of care for patients discharging from hospital back into the community by allowing for patients to be supplied the standard PBS quantity of one-months' supply of discharge medicines and eliminating the need for them to make an urgent appointment to see their local GP for medicines post-discharge.

Access to PBS subsidised quantities of medicines is not afforded to Australians being discharged from public hospitals in ACT. In contrast to other jurisdictions who are able to supply a months' worth of discharge medicines, patients being discharged from public hospitals in ACT are currently supplied only 3-7 days' worth of discharge medicines, forcing patients to seek immediate GP appointments to access more medicines prescriptions for vital treatments that will prevent readmission to hospital. This expectation is extremely difficult to achieve with the current GP shortages where Australians often have to wait up to three to four weeks to see their GP. This impacts on continuity during transitions of care where patients are most vulnerable and at higher risk of hospital readmission.

The expansion of PBS into public hospitals has allowed more Hospital Pharmacists to be employed and provide clinical pharmacy activities to patients, as well as allow investment into specialised pharmacy services, such as pharmacists specialising in oncology, paediatrics, emergency medicine and geriatric medicine. These services are necessary to safeguard and maximise the federal government's investment into new PBS medicines that treat complex conditions.

Equitable access to healthcare is one of the key principals of the *National Medicines Policy*<sup>3</sup>. Truly equitable healthcare cannot be achieved without established PRA arrangements in all states and territories in Australia. SHPA therefore, strongly recommends that the Commonwealth should make the PRAs a uniform policy in Australia and establish PRA with ACT, ensuring a consistent standard of care for vulnerable patients, and alleviating pressure on the primary care sector in the immediate post-discharge period.





## References

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- <sup>3</sup> Department of Health and Aged Care. (2022). National medicines policy 2022. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
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- <sup>5</sup> Pharmaceutical Society of Australia. (2016). National competency standards framework for pharmacists in Australia 2016. Available at: [https://shpa.org.au/publicassets/02aae786-f577-ec11-80de-005056be03d0/national-competency-standards-framework-for-pharmacists-in-australia-2016-pdf-2mb\\_1.pdf](https://shpa.org.au/publicassets/02aae786-f577-ec11-80de-005056be03d0/national-competency-standards-framework-for-pharmacists-in-australia-2016-pdf-2mb_1.pdf)
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