

# Media release

Thursday 21 March 2024

## Federal Budget focus as SHPA continues to take action on Closing the Gap

On National Close the Gap Day 2024, the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) continues its strong call for action to improve equity of access to medicines and clinical pharmacy services, and support medication adherence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As highlighted in its recent [Federal Pre-Budget submission](#), SHPA lists the need for public hospitals to be eligible to supply medicines under the Closing The Gap PBS Co-Payment Program among several urgent recommendations that will help address longstanding inequity in medicines access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients.

Key budget recommendations to improve medicines access for First Nations people include:

- Enabling hospital pharmacists to supply medicines to Indigenous Australians under the Closing the Gap (CTG) PBS Co-Payment Program.
- Expanding the CTG PBS Co-Payment Program to include Section 100 medicines including cancer medicines and highly specialised drugs
- Enabling Section 94 public and private hospital pharmacies to be Approved Service Providers for the Indigenous DAAs (IDAA) Program
- Integrating pharmacists within Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says hospital pharmacists see the acute care impacts of inequitable access to medicines for First Nations people and are calling for crucial policy changes now, as supported by the Australian Senate last year.

‘As well as giving hospital pharmacists the ability to supply medicines under the Closing The Gap PBS Co-Payment Program, the scope should also extend to cancer medicines and highly specialised drugs listed on various Section 100 programs on the PBS, which are currently excluded.

‘Unlike community pharmacies, public hospital pharmacies are currently unable to supply PBS medicines to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients under the Closing The Gap PBS Co-Payment Program, which hamper Australia’s efforts to close the gap in healthcare outcomes.

‘This results in higher out-of-pocket costs and co-payments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, or situations in which these patients miss out on medicines altogether, increasing risk of readmission to hospital.

‘We consistently receive feedback from our members about the challenges and convoluted workarounds they undertake to ensure their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients receive timely access to their medicines and culturally appropriate medicines counselling.

'The Commonwealth is armed with real and tangible solutions that can be readily enacted to bring us closer to achieving the principle of equity and access described in the [National Medicines Policy](#) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.'

Today SHPA also formally reiterates its strong support for First Nations people, and commitment to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, alongside the organisation's [Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan formally endorsed by Reconciliation Australia in October](#) last year.

Ms Michaels says the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) marks an important moment of accountability for the organisation.

'We celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first pharmacists of Australia, bush medicine practitioners and doctors who practised on this land.

'We pledge to listen, to learn and to act as we respectfully and collaboratively strengthen our organisation's reconciliation journey, to ensure change is embedded at the heart of SHPA.

'SHPA recently introduced First Nations as a specialty practice area recognisable through the [Australian and New Zealand College of Advanced Pharmacy \(ANZCAP\)](#), and on International Women's Day 2024 we opened member consultation on our first Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy.

'There is much to be done to address inequity in health care and Closing the Gap Day is one of many annual days of action for our organisation.'

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#### **For more information contact:**

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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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