

Media release

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More sustainable workforce, rural and regional care and Indigenous health lead SHPA's Budget blueprint

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) has urged leaders to not lose the lessons of the pandemic, highlighting the immense potential of specialist Hospital Pharmacists to reduce medication-related harms, optimise medication use, decrease hospital length of stay and reduce readmissions and their associated Medicare costs.

In its [Federal Budget 2022-23 submission released today](#), SHPA provides a blueprint for safer, sustainable medicines use by focusing on developing an expert workforce, improving aged care and care to Indigenous, rural and remote communities, and mitigating the threats of antimicrobial resistance and climate change.

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says a strong and sustainable workforce of pharmacists and technicians is crucial to maximising benefits to the health of Australians as well as investment in healthcare.

'As custodians of 23 per cent of PBS expenditure, Hospital Pharmacists are essential to ensuring the safe and optimal use of the scheme, which supports patient access to lifesaving medicines.

'Pharmacy is a relatively young workforce and recent data warns of declining student interest and the closure of some pharmacy schools. SHPA recommends prioritising an updated Pharmacy Workforce Planning study – it is now 14 years since the last iteration – to inform national strategies on growing and sustaining an experienced workforce.

'Experience is key, as embedding expert hospital pharmacist-led stewardship programs around key medicines, such as antimicrobials, anticoagulants, analgesics and antipsychotic treatments, is an important step to achieving cost-savings for the healthcare system, reductions in medicines usage and resistance and overall better health outcomes.'

Ms Michaels says focus on equity of care in rural and remote communities and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are also top priorities in 2022.

'Often spurred by necessity during COVID-19 lockdowns, we've seen evidence of successful telehealth models in rural and remote outpatient settings and SHPA recommends national funding of virtual clinical pharmacists in rural and remote areas to reduce medication-related harms and costs, improve patient outcomes and reduce burdens on rural and remote healthcare services.

'And while a key Closing the Gap Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) Co-payment Measure is designed to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians access low cost or free PBS medications, it currently excludes medications dispensed at discharge from public hospitals. This must change, through all hospitals in Australia, to improve equity of access of medications for Indigenous Australians as they return home.'

Ms Michaels says as Australia enters the third year of COVID-19, it is equally important to retain focus on the unfolding climate emergency in the wake of COP26.

'A new *Improving Sustainability in Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Industries Strategy* is needed to improve the sustainability of our sector and mitigate and reduce the known environmental impacts from the pharmacy and pharmaceutical industry.

'By defining best practice and aims for hospitals, community pharmacies and industry we can work together to reduce pharmaceutical wastage and environmental damage, which is rightly expected from the Australian community as the impacts of the climate emergency become more readily apparent and clearly forecast.'

SHPA 2022-23 Federal Budget Priorities:

1. *Develop a more sustainable and resilient hospital pharmacy workforce.*
2. *Provide funding for regional and rural health services to implement Virtual Clinical Pharmacy Services (VCPS).*
3. *Tackle the pressures of ambulance ramping and time burdens on elective surgery wait-lists by funding Pre-Admission Partnered Pharmacist Medication Charting (PPMC) services to perform medication reconciliation and charting for emergency departments and admitting medical or surgical teams.*
4. *Hospital pharmacist-embedded stewardship programs for antimicrobials, anticoagulants, analgesics and antipsychotic treatments as endorsed by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC) for antimicrobial stewardship under the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards.*
5. *Enable Hospital Pharmacists to supply medicines to Indigenous Australians under Closing the Gap PBS Co-Payment system.*
6. *Embed geriatric medicine pharmacists into residential aged care facilities at 1:200 ratio.*
7. *Establish an Improving Sustainability in Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Industries Strategy which sets best practice and aims for hospitals, community pharmacies and industry.*

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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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