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Gov responds to PBS subsidy calls

PATIENTS impacted by the bushfire crisis in NSW and Victoria will be able to access medicines subsidised by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) without a prescription under emergency provisions announced by Federal Health Minister, Greg Hunt, on Fri (**PD** breaking news).

In a statement released on Fri evening, Hunt said the emergency measures would empower pharmacists to dispense a wide range of PBS medicines using continued dispensing arrangements, which will remain in place until 31 Mar.

"Through continued dispensing arrangements, subject to the pharmacists' professional decision, people are able to obtain their usual PBS medicines without a prescription from their doctor, for the usual PBS cost," Hunt said.

"Under state and territory legislation, pharmacists may supply a limited amount of a medicine to a patient without a prescription if there is an urgent need and their doctor cannot be contacted.

"However, patients in this circumstance would have had to pay the full cost of this medicine, and without the respective co-

payments counting towards their PBS safety-net threshold.

"These temporary changes to continued dispensing arrangements will allow pharmacists to give patients up to one month's supply of the PBS listed medicine, without a script, once in a 12-month period depending on which State or Territory they are in."

The decision to aid patients impacted by bushfires came after repeated calls by leaders from the Pharmacy Guild of Australia and the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA), and followed the announcement of emergency dispensing provisions by NSW, Victorian and ACT governments last week.

Guild National President, George Tambassis, praised the Government's action to minimise the cost burden of accessing vital medicines for patients in fire-affected regions, noting that until today, patients had to pay the full-cost for medications if they did not have a prescription under the emergency measures.

"This welcome measure will allow pharmacists to assist patients in bushfire affected areas – it's all about helping people at this



stressful time," he said.

PSA National President, Dr Chris Freeman, said the expansion of the continued dispensing arrangements to cater for the on-going crisis was a positive step, however, he called on the Government to deliver a long-term solution that would ensure continuity of care whenever a disaster strikes.

"The last thing people need in the middle of this crisis is to find the money to pay for their medicines which would have otherwise been subsidised," he said.

"This provision will make a huge difference to unfair and unexpected out-of-pocket medicine expenses for people who are displaced by fires.

"We need nationally consistent emergency supply rules for medicines which ensure patients get the medicines they urgently need at the price they know and can afford."

Today's issue of **PD**

Pharmacy Daily today has two pages of news.

ACT bushfire dispensing order

PHARMACISTS in the ACT have been granted similar authority to dispense Schedule 4 medicines to patients affected by bushfires in NSW and Victoria, under an order made by the territory's Chief Health Officer on Fri (**PD** breaking news).

Pharmacy Guild of Australia ACT Branch President, Simon Blacker, said the decision would ensure continuity of care for patients.

"This is a sensible measure during this very distressing time for patients impacted by the bushfire disaster to help ensure they continue to have access to medicines; and recognises the expertise of pharmacists in determining where an emergency supply is appropriate," he said.

"This is a great step towards permanently expanding and streamlining the capacity of pharmacists all over Australia to assist patients with their prescription medicines during and after natural disasters."

Schedule 8 medicines and a small number of 'Appendix D medicines' cannot be supplied under this provision, which expires on 31 Mar.

Hunt announces additional P2 masks

THE Federal Government will distribute an additional 576,000 P2 face masks to at risk people in bushfire-affected parts of South Australia and Tasmania, Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, announced on Fri.

A further 505,000 masks from the National Medical Stockpile have been reserved for NSW, while Victoria has been allocated a further 505,600.

The fresh supply of Government-funded masks, brings the total provided or reserved from the national stockpile to 3.5 million.

Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, said the additional masks would ensure the safety of people in bushfire-affected communities.

"The Government is providing



505,600 masks to Defence Force personnel so they can carry out their important work safely," he said.

"In addition, 64,000 masks are being provided to South Australia and 6,400 masks are being provided to Tasmania, following requests from these states.

"The Government has also begun replenishing the national stockpile of P2 masks."

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Dispensary Corner

LAWYERS representing a Canadian pharmacist who had his registration cancelled last month have accused regulators of "an abuse of process".

The College of Pharmacists of Manitoba, called time on Kris Thorkelson's career as a pharmacist after he agreed to a plea deal with US authorities charging him over series of offences related to online pharmacies he owned, broadcaster, CBC reported.

The charges laid against Thorkelson in 2014 were linked to the sale and importation of US\$78 million-worth of unapproved, mislabelled and in some cases counterfeit medications to doctors in the US.

Had the pharmacist been convicted on the original charges he would have faced up to 45 years behind bars plus financial penalties, however his legal team negotiated a plea deal which resulted in a sentence of 60 months probation, with the first six months under home detention, and a fine of US\$250,000.

Having reviewed the case representatives of the College rejected suggestions that Thorkelson was a "gallant hero" who "unselfishly took all responsibility" for the actions of his businesses.

"The reality is Thorkelson is not a gallant hero," representatives of the College said.

"He did what he needed to do to protect himself and avoid a very lengthy prison term."

Pharm for Fires fundraiser



STAFF at Chemist Discount Centre pharmacies across Australia were doing their bit to support those impacted by the ongoing bushfire crisis in NSW and Victoria last week.

The group launched its Pharm for Fires campaign with teams dressing in red, orange and yellow on Thu and Fri, to collect money, coordinate raffles and guessing games to raise funds for the Bendigo Bank Disaster Appeal, which has pledged to direct 100% of proceeds to communities in need via the Salvation Army.



Pictured, the team from Chemist Discount Centre, Churchill, Victoria.

Inset, the superheroes of Chemist Discount Centre Mackay, Queensland.

Bushfire affected diabetes patients

PATIENTS with diabetes who have been affected by the ongoing bushfires across the country are being urged to go to their nearest National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) Access Point.

In a message to patients, the NDSS advised them that they can use their NDSS registration number to access subsidised

products.

Diabetes Australia recommended patients with any concerns or questions about any aspect of their diabetes management that has been affected by the fires to contact the NDSS Helpline (1300 136 588), talk to a trained health professional or email ndss@diabetesaustralia.com.au.



Weekly Comment

Welcome to Pharmacy Daily's weekly comment feature. This week's contributor is **Andrew Whelan**, General Manager at Australian Pharmacy Group.



2020 Pharmacy Market Outlook

SO WHAT does 2020 look like for those looking to buy or sell a pharmacy? The uncertain conditions that characterised the year just passed – namely a tightening of lending from banks and a looming 7th CPA – are largely behind us, which should afford buyers with easier access to capital and greater certainty.

If lessons can be taken from the release year of the 6th CPA in 2015, buyers and sellers can both expect more opportunity in 2020 as the typical 'watch with caution' approach transitions to an approach of 'it is time act'.

With regard to lending conditions, we are seeing a healthy appetite for pharmacy transactions from the traditional major lenders. The key change being that lenders are tending to settle into a niche of what suits their risk appetite, rather than being open for business across the board. If there is strong pharmacy transaction that requires bank lending, in most cases there will be a bank there to support it. This wasn't always the case in 2019.

The team at AP Group wish all prospective buyers and sellers all the best for a prosperous 2020.