

Deregulation won't stop rising costs

REFORM of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) subsidies, not deregulation of pharmacy ownership rules, is needed to reduce out-of-pocket expenses the Pharmacy Guild of Australia believe.

Highlighting the Guild's Affordable Medicines Reform policy (AMR), which calls for the general PBS co-payment to be cut by more than 50% to \$19, during a webinar last week, the organisation's National President, Trent Twomey, said action was needed to reduce out-of-pocket costs for Australians.

"The data is very black and white," he said.

"We have the fourth highest out-of-pocket expenses in the OECD - fourth to the US, Canada and Switzerland.

"Need I say it is a deregulated industry and anyone can own pharmacies in those jurisdictions, and they have the highest out-of-pocket expenses.

"So deregulation is not going to make medicines more affordable.



"What is going to make medicines more affordable is the Guild's proposal to reduce the \$41.30 - as it is today, or \$42.50 as it will be from 01 Jan 2022 - general co-payment down to \$19."

Twomey said that while the current PBS model was a good system for supporting access to "new high-cost, low-volume drugs for rare diseases, as is its purpose... its purpose is also to ensure that those high-volume, low-cost medicines that we're using for chronic diseases are also equally affordable for Australians".

"Currently there needs to be an investment in this space," he said.

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New role for PSA's Freeman

PHARMACEUTICAL

Society of Australia National President, Associate Professor Chris Freeman (pictured), has been appointed as the University of Queensland's School of Pharmacy's inaugural Associate Professor of Safe and Effective Medication Research.

"I am very honoured to be taking on such an important role," he said.



New NSW Council to be constructive

INCREASED community pharmacist representation on the Pharmacy Council of NSW will facilitate more constructive regulation of the sector, Council member, Rick Samimi, believes.

The Sydney-based pharmacy owner, who was appointed to the Council as a pharmacist practitioner member in Feb, was the only one of five serving practitioner members to be returned after the organisation's elections earlier this month.

Samimi, who will be joined on the incoming Council by fellow community pharmacists, Caroline Diamantis, John Bronger, Quinn On and Kate Gray, following the election (PD 09 Dec), said the new members would be able to give the regulator a clearer insight into the day-to-day challenges experienced in the sector.

"I would also like to thank the four outgoing Pharmacy Council members for their support since my appointment to the PC in early 2021," Samimi told *Pharmacy Daily*.

"As a life long & passionate community pharmacist, I appreciate and respect all the dedicated and hardworking pharmacists in NSW working in various sectors.

"As custodians of medicines, we all have legal and professional responsibilities to adhere to in

order to ensure safety of the public.

"Pharmacists working in community pharmacies across NSW have in particular done a great job during the COVID-19 pandemic and competently demonstrated their ability to implement and provide public health services in an ethical, cost effective and easily accessible way.

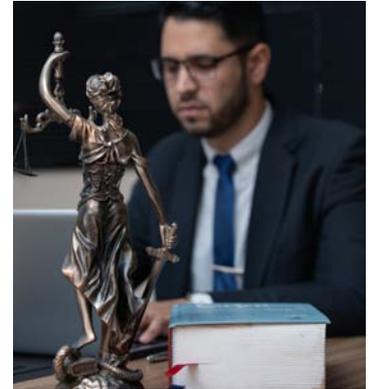
"The public response has been overwhelmingly positive because community pharmacies also remained open, despite confronting severe pandemic related issues including commercial challenges.

"Pharmacy must now build on this success.

"In my view, not withstanding its primary regulatory role which includes protection of safety of the public, the next Pharmacy Council can, and must, play a much more constructive role in facilitating pathways to assist pharmacists to fully meet and adhere to their legal responsibilities in order to avoid regulatory consequences, which most currently deem as overly punitive.

"My newly elected colleagues and I will work with the remaining members of the Pharmacy Council and discharge our regulatory duties bestowed on us to the best of our abilities.

"However, as full time practicing community pharmacists, we will



bring a better understanding of the sector and its daily challenges to the table.

"We will assist the next Pharmacy Council to improve engagement with the sector with more effective and regular communication of the regulatory responsibilities of pharmacists with more remedial pathways.

"We will do this by working more closely with educational and representative bodies to communicate and improve awareness and compliance in order to avoid regulatory breaches."

Of the four other pharmacist members who were on the Council prior to the election, Dr Erica Sainsbury and Mike Anderson did not contest the election, while Majella Hill and Marina Holt missed out on re-election by 52 and 63 votes respectively.



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FIP call to action

THE International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) is urging pharmacists to back its global call to action for advancing pharmaceutical education.

The organisation hopes the campaign will strengthen pharmacists' education and support the advancement of pharmaceutical practice.

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Dispensary Corner

CANADIAN pharmacist, Soosai Stanislaus, is set to have one simple resolution for 2022 - not to access patients' health records without authorisation.

The Edmonton-based practitioner was found guilty of unprofessional conduct and had his registration suspended for three months following an Alberta College of Pharmacy Tribunal hearing.

The College revealed that Stanislaus misused his position to access the electronic health records of a woman after they had been involved in a car crash on 22 Jan 2018.

The Tribunal heard that Stanislaus accessed the individual's records on 06 Feb 2018, and discussed information he had obtained while reviewing the files with the woman the following day.

Stanislaus told the hearing that he had accessed the data "out of concern for her health and wanting to help her", adding he did not disclose, post or print her health information.

However, the Tribunal heard that "at no time did [the woman] ever approach or deal with Stanislaus in his capacity as a pharmacist, and at no time did she ever grant access to her health file for him".



Boosters need injection

FUNDING for the rollout of COVID-19 booster vaccines will need to be increased to entice primary healthcare providers to participate, Pharmacy Guild of Australia Tasmanian Branch Vice President, John Dowling, warns.

Speaking with *ABC Hobart*, Dowling said the pharmacy profession were glad to be allowed to participate in the provision of primary doses of the vaccines, but noted "there's a bit of a problem with the payment for the boosters".

"[It's] not what we'd hoped for," he said.

"And it's very difficult to make that work... I know a lot of the GPs won't be doing them for the same reason, so it's something we need to watch for.

"We really need to ensure that it's a viable proposition for pharmacies and GPs to provide these booster vaccinations.

"The previous model for the first and second doses meant that the pharmacies and GPs got a certain amount for the first shot, which was a lower amount, but they got



paid substantially more for the second, which encouraged you to get people back for that shot, which was a good idea.

"Unfortunately the Government's chosen to only give us the same payment for the boosters as the first shot, and that's not really [enough]... when you have to draw things up into individual vials, you have to go through the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) record to make sure that they're eligible for their booster, you have to fill in the paperwork.

"There's quite a lot involved.... and I know that a lot of the GPs I've spoken to - and they get paid substantially more than us - are not going to do it."

Victoria lands mRNA production deal

VICTORIA is set to be the home of Australia's first mRNA vaccine manufacturing facility, following the announcement of an "in principle agreement" between the Federal and State Governments, and Moderna.

The deal forms part of the Federal Government's preparations for possible future pandemics.

The facility is expected to have capacity to produce 100 million mRNA vaccines a year, from 2024, pending regulatory and planning approval, Prime

Minister Scott Morrison said.

"This investment will continue to secure Australia's future economic prosperity while protecting lives by providing access to world-leading mRNA vaccines made on Australian soil," he said.

"The new mRNA manufacturing facility in Victoria will produce respiratory vaccines for potential future pandemics and seasonal health issues such as the common flu, protecting lives and livelihoods."

CLICK HERE for more.

Guild Update

Workforce shortages

ACTION to address workforce shortages will feature heavily on the Pharmacy Guild's agenda for 2022.

National President Professor Trent Twomey has told members 15 December is the new date for reopening Australia to skilled workers.

He warned community pharmacies are struggling with workforce shortages and workforce distribution inequities, including across regional Australia.

The Guild advocated strongly and successfully to have pharmacists returned to the Priority Migration Skilled Occupation List.

As well, the Guild will call for extra funding to support university pharmacy schools and call for stronger Government incentives to build the rural and regional workforce.

Backing this effort, the Guild is launching a Workforce Capability Project to investigate workforce composition, qualifications and training, remuneration, pharmacy operational scope, career pathways and future needs and capability.

Guild members will assist in creating this single source of accessible data on employability, capability and capacity.