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Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news.

NSW support

PHARMACIES in NSW with a turnover of less than \$50 million, who saw a 40% decline in their turnover in Jan and the first two weeks of Feb, will be eligible to receive financial support from the State Government.

Speaking in the NSW Legislative Assembly yesterday, State Treasurer, Matt Kean, said "eligible compliant businesses will be able to access cash within five to 10 business days of putting in their application". "We want to make sure that we get cash in the hands of those small businesses," he said.

Kean added that NSW was the only jurisdiction in the country offering such a package.

Concerns raised over NMP Review

ADVOCACY group, Better Access Australia (BAA), is calling on the Federal Government to put the National Medicines Policy (NMP) Review on hold until after this year's Federal Election.

In a letter sent to Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, earlier this week, the group raised concerns that the Coalition intended to pursue a policy of removing medicines from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) as part of the revised NMP.

BAA noted that the Government had committed to undertaking a comprehensive assessment of the NMP in the run up to the 2019 election, pledging to launch a review within nine months of being elected, "but this was delayed until Sep 2021 as a result of COVID-19".

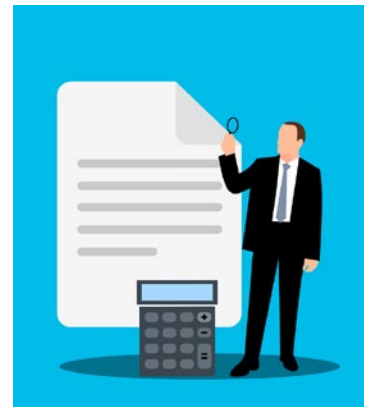
The review is currently slated to be completed by the end of Mar, less than a month after the public consultation period concludes on 02 Mar.

"BAA is asking you to halt the rushed review of Australia's NMP and immediately clarify that it is not your Government's intention to pursue a policy of disinvestment in the community's access to medicines on the PBS," the organisation said.

"In an effort to complete the review prior to the next election, it is being conducted internally by the Department of Health via a rushed process resulting in the disenfranchisement of the community.

"It is not only the lack of recognition of the community's request for the NMP to acknowledge that patient access, both in time to access and cost of access is an integral principle for them – but it is the emergence and dominance of what appears to be a new Government initiative to remove access to medicines and technology as part of the revised policy.

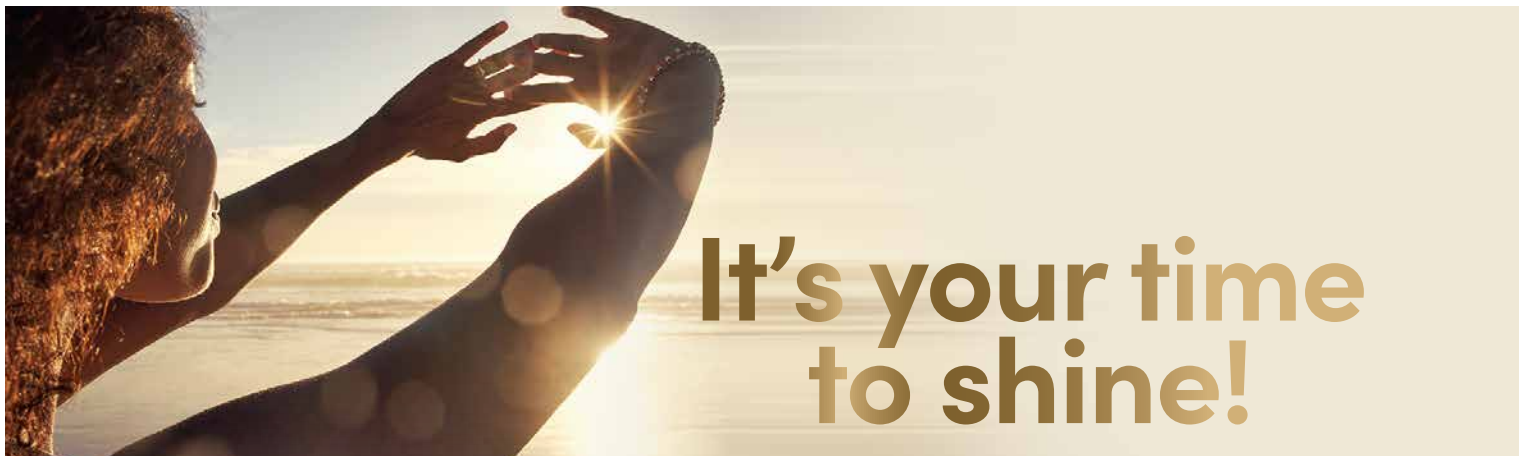
"The Minister for Health regularly cites Labor's 'deferrals' policy in



2011 as a stark comparator to your Government's own approach to the PBS.

"The community needs to know right now if this 'disinvestment' initiative in the draft NMP is a new policy position of your Government.

"Therefore, we are asking you to urgently and publicly confirm whether the Government is about to introduce a program to cut access to PBS medicines as part of the forthcoming 2022-23 Budget?"



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Pharmacy 'let down' by Government

HARD-WORKING pharmacists have been repeatedly "let down" by the Federal Government during the COVID-19 pandemic, Labor's Julie Collins, believes.

Speaking in the House of Representatives yesterday the Shadow Minister for Agriculture, criticised the Morrison Government's handling of the rollout of both the COVID-19 vaccination and free rapid antigen tests (RATs) for concession cardholders.

Collins questioned the rationale behind the Government's refusal to make RATs freely available for all Australians, while covering the cost of more expensive PCR tests.

"I still don't understand the difference between getting a rapid antigen test and getting a PCR test and why the Government pays for one and not the other, particularly when the rapid antigen tests are

cheaper than the PCR tests under Medicare," she said.

"I also don't understand why the Government purchased those rapid antigen tests so late in the piece.

"We were opening up in Dec and most of the tests were not ordered until Jan.

"How did this happen when the Government was getting so many warnings last year?

"It's not just the rapid antigen tests that the Prime Minister has let us down on... Pharmacists are working so hard trying to give the vaccine to as many people as they possibly can as quickly as they possibly can, but they too were let down by the government.

"They were let down by the Government when it came to the booster shots and how we could get them in people's arms.

"The Government changed the time frames and said everybody



could go and get them.

"They kept changing the rules to get people through quicker, but they didn't make better provision for people to be able to get their booster shot.

"They didn't make sure that there was a surge workforce to give all of these injections.

"So we had a complete failure on the booster shots and a complete failure on the rapid antigen tests.

"We have been continually let down by this Government."

AODR record

THE rate of new registrations on the Australian Organ Donor Register (AODR) hit a record high in 2021 with more than 350,000 people signing up to the scheme.

[CLICK HERE](#) to register.

Indigenous pharmacist scholarship

THE National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) is aiming to boost Indigenous representation within the pharmacy workforce through a new scholarship program.

The NACCHO Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Pharmacist Scholarship provides subsidy and support for prospective and current Indigenous pharmacy students with the goal of building a pharmacist workforce amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

NACCHO Deputy CEO, Dr Dawn Casey, said there was a significant under-representation of First Nations people in the pharmacy profession.

"This financial support combined with mentorship will provide a tangible way to help students to thrive in their professional training and stands to build confident and self-determined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pharmacy sector leaders," she said.

[CLICK HERE](#) for more information.

Zostavax update

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is urging immunisers that careful assessment and screening of immunocompromised patients is essential before administering Zostavax.

In an update released today, the TGA highlighted the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation's (ATAGI's) statement on the use of zoster vaccines in older adults and the zoster vaccine for Australian adults fact sheet, as key tools for immunisers.



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The Pharmacy Guild of Australia



Dispensary Corner

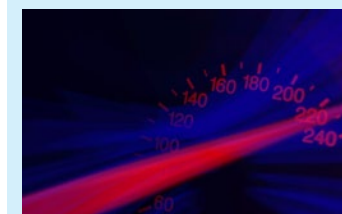
PHARMACISTS are undoubtedly important members of society, but should that entitle them to speed?

A ruling by Taunton Magistrates' Court in Somerset would suggest they have a licence to speed.

Appearing before the court this week, in relation to a speeding offence in Dec 2020, pharmacist Manraj Singh Punni, was handed six demerit points, which pushed him over the 12 point limit.

However, the 48-year-old has avoided losing his driver's licence as the Magistrate told him that "the local community would be adversely affected by your inability to work if you were to lose your licence", the *Chard and Ilminster News* reported.

Punni was instead fined \$2,260 and ordered to pay costs of \$170.



Paediatric COVAX boost

PHARMACIES are set to be given the green-light to administer Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine, Spikevax, to children aged six years and older, after the shot was granted provisional approval by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) this morning (**PD** breaking news).

The decision follows the TGA's approval of Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine for children aged over five years, in Dec 2021 (**PD** 06 Dec 2021).

The paediatric Moderna vaccine will use the same preparation used for older age groups, however a lower dose of 0.25mL will be given to children age six to 11 years, compared to the 0.5mL dose administered to those 12 years and older.

"In making this regulatory decision, the TGA carefully considered data from the KidCOVE clinical trial, which was conducted at multiple sites throughout Canada and the US and included up to 4,000 participants aged six to 11 years," the regulator said.

"The study demonstrated that the immune response to the vaccine in children was similar to that seen in older age groups.

"Clinical trials also showed that the safety profile in children is



similar to that seen in adults.

"The most frequent adverse events seen in clinical trials in children aged six to 11 years were short-term and included injection site pain, redness and/or swelling, axillary (groin) swelling or tenderness, fatigue, headache, fever and muscle pain.

Further advice on the rollout of Spikevax to this age group will be provided to Government by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI).

MEANWHILE, Moderna's CEO, Stephane Bancel, said the company aims to have a "pan-vaccine" to protect against COVID-19, influenza and other respiratory diseases by Aug 2023, *Reuters* reports.

NSW Police bust pharmacy robber

A NSW man is due to appear before Newcastle Local Court today after being charged in relation to an armed robbery at a pharmacy in Sydney yesterday.

NSW Police reported that two members of staff at a pharmacy on Glebe Point Road were threatened by a male, who demanded prescription medication.

The suspect fled the scene and was apprehended more than three hours later at Cardiff railway station near Newcastle.

Police confirmed that no one was injured during the raid.

Aged care meds safety survey

PHARMACISTS are being invited to share their views on medicines-related harm in aged care residents, and facilitators and barriers to reducing these harms, with researchers from the University of Tasmania.

CLICK HERE to take the survey.

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