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PBS meds unaffordable

INCREASES to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) general co-payment are part of a “dangerous trend” making critical medicines unaffordable for Australians, Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Professor Trent Twomey, warns.

With the PBS general co-payment on track to hit \$50 per script by 2030, Twomey said medications for a range of chronic health conditions, alongside smoking cessation treatments and long-acting contraception were stretching middle-income households’ budgets.

The Guild reported that a growing number of patients are asking pharmacists which of the medications prescribed by their GP can be skipped to avoid having to pay the PBS co-payment.

“This is a dangerous trend, as prescribed medications are designed to work together to preserve the health and ultimately save the lives of the patients who need them,” Twomey said.

“Pharmacists are worried that there will be more preventable ill-health and even deaths as people are increasingly finding themselves having to choose between buying

the medicines they need and other essential items like rent, groceries and petrol.”

With a Federal Election due to be called in the coming months, research conducted on behalf of the Guild in a number of marginal electorates, found that 31% of middle-income households have found it difficult to afford medicines on the PBS at the current \$42.50 general co-payment, with 13% of people reporting that they had gone without prescribed medicines because of their cost.

The Guild noted that modelling from the University of Technology Sydney has found that hospitalisations and loss of productivity due to a failure to take medicines as instructed by medical professionals could cost the federal budget \$10.4 billion in a year for hypertension, dyslipidemia and depression conditions alone.



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Qld to unleash pharmacy's potential

QUEENSLAND Health is being urged to empower the State's pharmacist and allied health workforce to operate to their full scope of practice to boost patient outcomes, by an expert advisory group.

The *Unleashing the potential: an open and equitable health system* report sets out a roadmap to reform the system over a two-year timeframe, and advises the Queensland Government on "how best to harness the opportunities arising from the COVID-19 pandemic response to support the best possible health and healthcare for Queenslanders".

The report backed calls for workforce reform to empower health professionals, "particularly nurses and pharmacists", to work to the top of their scope of practice, made by key stakeholders.

"A reduction in red tape and closer alignment between education providers and the health service were noted as key enablers of workforce reform," the authors said.

"Key recommendations included increasing the utilisation of nurses for providing primary care and expanding pharmacist-administered vaccinations and prescribing.

"It is anticipated by stakeholders that this would reduce hospital admissions, improve efficiency and increase access to care."

Pharmacy Guild of Australia Queensland Branch President, Chris Owen, welcomed the report's findings, saying "many of the non-urgent presentations to emergency departments include supply of repeat prescriptions, vaccinations and common ailments like acne, sunburn and muscle cramps – all of which could easily be dealt with at a local community pharmacy".

"One of the lessons out of the COVID-19 pandemic was that communities wanted to be able to seamlessly engage with multiple primary healthcare providers to receive the best care possible," he said.

"Community pharmacies are a critical part of primary healthcare



with consumers visiting, on average, 18 times a year.

"In Queensland alone, we have seen almost 1.2 million COVID-19 vaccinations administered in community pharmacies since Jun 2021.

"Access to vaccines in the local community was crucial to achieving the high vaccination rate we've been able to achieve.

"We welcome the report and are committed to partnering with the Queensland Government to make it a reality."

AHPRA backs English tests

COVID-19-INDUCED disruption to English language tests has prompted the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) to acknowledge additional testing services.

The regulator said the OET computer-based test and the OET@home test will be accepted for applications received until 21 Feb 2023, while the TOEFL iBT Home Edition will be approved for applications submitted until 01 Jun.

"It is important to note that all other requirements as set out in the relevant Board's English language skills registration standard will still apply, please see the relevant National Board's website for more information," AHPRA said.

"There are no changes to any other requirements in the standards."

Staff shortages hit British pharmacies

WORKFORCE shortages are hitting British pharmacies, with at least one store being forced to close for "a number of days", while other stores have cut opening hours, the *Swindon Advertiser* reports.

The Wiltshire-based publication said the shutters remained down at the Lloyds Pharmacy in Covingham, last week, with a notice in the store's window saying, "due to not having a pharmacist available, unfortunately we are unable to open for the day".

The sign placed in the



pharmacy's window provided a number for patients to call for "urgent prescriptions".

Another Lloyds Pharmacy on the outskirts of Swindon closed its doors more than six hours earlier than scheduled yesterday due to staffing issues, the publication reported.

Diseased livers undergo sex-change

RESEARCH from the University of Queensland has found that the livers of men diagnosed with hepatic diseases change sex as part of a potential self-protective mechanism.

The discovery was made during an investigation into why disruption of the body's circadian clock is associated with obesity, type 2 diabetes and liver diseases.

"When a high-fat diet was fed to mice that had their circadian clock gene turned off, we expected them to develop diabetes or non-alcoholic fatty

liver disease (NAFLD) like the control mice, but they didn't," the researchers said.

"We also found that the liver of the obese male mice had been feminised probably due in part to the protective nature of the female sex hormone, oestrogen.

"The more advanced the disease, the more feminisation we saw in the liver tissue."

Like reproductive organs, the liver is sexually dimorphic, which means there are significant differences between the metabolic function of male and female livers.



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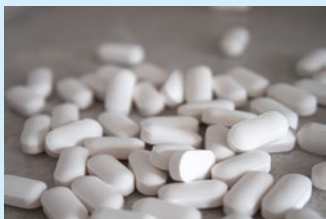
KANSAS-BASED pharmacist, Gregory Burger, is warning that legislation to compel pharmacists to dispense prescribed medicines for COVID-19, being considered by the State's legislators, could have serious health consequences.

In an editorial in the *Kansas Reflector*, Burger raised concerns over the language being used in a Bill that would effectively force pharmacists to dispense off-label use of medicines for the treatment of COVID-19.

The Bill states that, "nothing shall prevent a pharmacist from refusing to fill or refill any prescription... unless such prescription is being used to treat or prevent a COVID-19 infection".

"The sentiment of one word - 'unless' - is chilling," Burger said. "This Bill tells every pharmacist that despite years of training, experience and commitment, they cannot practice their professional duty to screen a drug for safety if that drug is related to COVID in any way."

"I don't know what will happen next with legislations, but I'm gravely concerned these conversations are even happening."



SA gets training boost

REGIONAL and remote South Australian communities are set to benefit from the Federal Government's Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training program, with Flinders' University receiving \$1.94 million in funding to deliver placements from its campuses in Murray Bridge and Berri.

The project aims to address workforce retention by creating a career pathway for allied health professionals, including pharmacists, to become academic clinical educators while also providing supervisor training to encourage local health professionals and community members to mentor and support students.

Flinders' University's College of Medicine and Public Health Executive Dean, Professor Jonathan Craig, said the funding announcement would leverage the institution's "already significant investment" in rural and remote Australia, through Flinders Rural and Remote Health.

"Flinders' University has delivered health education and training in regional South Australia and



the Northern Territory for over 20 years, with a strong national and international reputation for providing community-engaged inter-professional training for medical, nursing and allied health students," he said.

"Working together with our local health service partners, we will look to expand our current speech pathology and social work service-learning activities to include multidisciplinary placements for students studying other allied health degrees including dietetics, audiology, public health, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, podiatry and pharmacy, not just from Flinders' University, but also UniSA, University of Adelaide and TAFE SA."

Guild 'gobsmacked' by AMAQ claims

THE Australian Medical Association Queensland (AMAQ) is being urged to stop putting profits before patients, as the turf war between the medical profession and the Pharmacy Guild of Australia heats up.

Responding to a media statement issued by AMAQ about the Urinary Tract Infection Pharmacy Pilot - Queensland, headlined 'were bladder cancer diagnoses missed', a Guild spokesperson described it as a "new low" for the medical group.

"We are beyond gobsmacked that the AMAQ would deliberately seek to instil fear in women about cancer, when they have been successfully treated for a non-complex UTI," the spokesperson said.

"This is reprehensible and a new low for the AMAQ."

"Just a few years ago, the AMAQ claimed lives would be lost if anyone other than GPs were allowed to offer vaccinations - they were wrong then and they are wrong now."

Pharmacy Guild Update

APP speakers

PROFESSOR Lisa Nissen will speak at the Australian Pharmacy Professional Conference & Trade Exhibition (APP) held 24-27 March 2022 on the Gold Coast. Professor Nissen will be addressing attendees at 12:15pm on Saturday 26 March.

Professor Nissen and her co-presenter, pharmacist, educator, and researcher Dr Lynda Cardiff, will discuss the fundamental principles of prescribing and demystify what prescribing is within the community pharmacy setting.

Other confirmed speakers include the Hon, Greg Hunt, Hon Mark Butler MP, Oily Bridge, Ross Tsuyuki and Mark McCrindle.

APP2022's program has been designed to focus on practical information as we move into the next stages in our battle against COVID-19.

The 100 per cent COVID Refund Guarantee, introduced for APP2021, will also continue to be offered at the 2022 event, providing peace of mind to delegates.

If attendees can't travel to APP2022 due to COVID-19 restrictions they will be entitled to a full refund.

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