

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features two pages of news.

Under pressure

THE rollout of COVID-19 vaccination services and efforts to provide rapid antigen tests (RATs) is having an "extreme" impact on employee pharmacists' workloads, a survey from Professional Pharmacists Australia reveals.

The union's CEO, Jill McCabe, noted that "this situation is beyond dire", with 79% of respondents reporting that they did not believe their workplace was adequately staffed to deal with the additional services.

McCabe noted that supply shortages were causing significant issues for many pharmacists, while almost 50% of respondents expressed concerns about their workplace's health and safety measures.

The survey also found that one-in-four employee pharmacists have been buying their own personal protective equipment.

COVAX fees 'hopelessly inadequate'

AUSTRALIA'S community pharmacy-based COVID-19 vaccination (COVAX) program needs an urgent funding boost to maximise the sector's involvement, the Pharmacy Guild of Australia believes.

Under the existing model, pharmacies are paid \$16 for administering primary doses, with an additional \$10 payment if a patient receives their second dose at the same store, with pharmacies administering boosters receiving \$26 for the service, which was increased from \$16 in the lead up to Christmas (PD breaking news).

Speaking with *Pharmacy Daily*, Guild Victorian Branch President, Anthony Tassone, noted that many pharmacy owners have said the current funding arrangements are "hopelessly inadequate", with stores providing the service at a loss.

"The \$10 increase in remuneration for booster doses was not only welcomed, it was greatly necessary to make the COVAX service more sustainable," he said.

"[However] the ongoing feedback we receive from our members is the \$16 for the primary dose of the COVID-19 vaccine is hopelessly



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inadequate to recognise the time and effort to deliver the service, particularly with paediatric vaccinations.

"With the announcement of the five to 11-year-old vaccination program, pharmacies are spending more time for less remuneration with more involved cases.

"They're doing what they can to help protect their patients and communities, but it should not be up to pharmacies to subsidise the Federal Government for its own vaccination program."

With data from the Australian Immunisation Register reporting that community pharmacies have administered more than

four million doses of COVAX, Guild National President, Trent Twomey, also said an increase in remuneration was needed to boost the number of stores willing to participate in the program.

Twomey added that moves to accelerate the rollout of boosters combined with the launch of the childhood vaccination program meant there was a need to maximise the number of pharmacies participating in the program.

"The reality is this: A payment which fully covers costs would bring even more pharmacists into this enormous national effort – and deliver rapid protection for all," he said.

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Dispensary Corner

THE Federal Government may have turfed one tennis star out of the country on the grounds his presence could have stirred up anti-vaccination sentiments, but little has been done to curb skepticism of the shots within its own ranks, it appears.

Shadow Health Minister, Mark Butler, has urged Prime Minister Scott Morrison to "take responsibility for the actions of his backbenchers", after controversial National Party MP, George Christensen, urged parents not to vaccinate their children against COVID-19, using approved mRNA vaccines.

Butler highlighted a post promoting a blog by Christensen heralding the views of prominent anti-vaxxer, US-based virologist, Dr Robert Malone, who has been criticised for spreading misinformation about the shots.

Groundhog Day looms

AUSTRALIA is in the grips of a "Groundhog Day of madness" with policymakers repeating the same missteps time and again, Pharmacy Guild of Australia Victorian Branch President, Anthony Tassone, says.

Speaking to *Pharmacy Daily*, Tassone noted that while National Cabinet has given the green-light for health workers to be exempted from COVID-19 isolation requirements if they are asymptomatic and have tested negative for the virus, he was concerned pharmacy employees could be excluded, as they appeared to be from priority testing in the early days of the pandemic in Victoria.

"It's a Groundhog Day of madness," he said.

"What I've learned from 2022 is that public health bureaucrats and decision-makers have learned nothing from the previous two years."

In an interview on *Australia Today*, Tassone told host, Steve Price, that it was "vitally important" that State and Territory Governments

extend the isolation exemptions to pharmacy assistants.

"Without our pharmacy assistants the operation doesn't work," he said.

"Any government that hasn't put in place these measures from National Cabinet needs to get its act together," he said.

"They need to give some clarity here so that we can get on with doing what we can to look after our patients and our communities, and keep the doors open."

"There's not a day that goes by that I'm not contacted by multiple pharmacy owners to say, 'I don't know whether I'm going to have enough staff to open tomorrow, what's happening with these isolation exemptions?'"

"We just need to have the decisions so we can play on".

MEANWHILE, Tassone added that pharmacies were "doing their very best" to obtain supplies of rapid antigen tests, but warned shortages were likely over the next two weeks.

Guild Update

Pharmacy COVID-19 vaccinations

COMMUNITY pharmacies have administered around four million vaccinations against COVID - up from three million at 24 Dec - and the pace is quickening.

Pharmacy Guild National President, Professor Trent Twomey, says two cuts to the minimum interval between second and booster doses - to four months (from 04 Jan) and then three months (from 31 Jan or earlier) are driving demand, along with paediatric doses.

Professor Twomey told a recent pharmacists' webinar that while the interval between doses for five to 11 year-olds is technically a range of three to eight weeks, ATAGI recommends eight weeks.

He said the Pharmacy Guild had been pleased to negotiate some improvement in remuneration to pharmacists for COVID vaccinations, by reversing some funding cuts last year - but a payment which fully covers costs would bring even more pharmacists into this enormous national effort.

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Farewell Dr Erica

FORMER University of Sydney School of Pharmacy Senior Lecturer, Dr Erica Sainsbury, will be farewelled at a funeral service at West Pymble Anglican Church, on Fri.

One of the pharmacy profession's most universally respected and admired figures, Sainsbury passed away on Christmas Eve (**PD 05 Jan**).

Having served on the Pharmacy Council of NSW, her former colleagues issued a statement yesterday describing her as "a dear friend" and "a leader in the pharmacy profession".