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## Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news, plus a full page from Sigma Healthcare.

## Private label

SIGMA Healthcare is offering a 100% money back quality guarantee on its Pharmacy Care private label range. See page four for more.

## Papal praise

PHARMACISTS are being applauded by the leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis, for the vital role they have played during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Pontiff described pharmacists as "a bridge between citizens and the health system", noting they stepped in to ease social tensions throughout the crisis.

# Rising confidence in pharmacy: UTS

CONFIDENCE in the community pharmacy sector is continuing to rise, with the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Pharmacy Barometer, hitting a record high.

The latest reading, taken in Oct 2021, delivered a confidence score of 139.5 out of 200 - up from the previous record level of 126.8 in 2020.

Launching the 2021 Pharmacy Barometer, former Head of the UTS Graduate School of Health, Emeritus Professor Shalom 'Charlie' Benrimoj, attributed the positive sentiment in the sector to the financial success of the Seventh Community Pharmacy Agreement (7CPA) and the role the profession has played throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

"If you look at 2016 we were below 80, so [there's been] a massive increase over time, so the sector's obviously doing something and is working well," he said.

"The [UTS Community Pharmacy Barometer Expert] Panel as a whole



believe this increase is due to two factors.

"One is the financial stimuli because of the 7CPA - we have a feeling that most people believe the 7CPA, at least financially [has been] an excellent agreement by the [Pharmacy] Guild [of Australia].

"And secondly the issue of COVID... although really negative for the population as a whole... [for] pharmacy, because of its response and because of the need for pharmacy to get more

involved, has really stimulated the profession."

While the Barometer hit an all time high, Benrimoj noted that there was "a significant difference in the confidence of community pharmacy between employed pharmacists and owners".

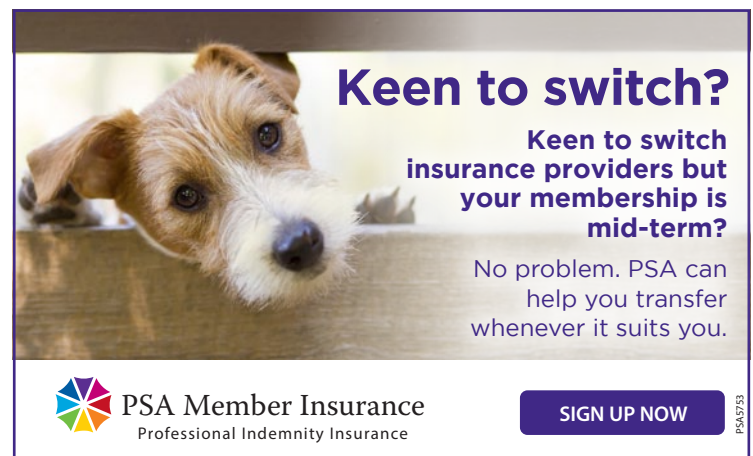
"There needs to be some action to try and reduce that gap," he said. "Because, if that gap remains, we're probably going to lose these people as employees of community pharmacy."

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Bianco L et al., J Am Geriatr Soc 2012; 60:1180-1.

## SHPA backs bipartisan co-pay cuts

**MOVES** to lower the maximum general Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) co-payment announced by both Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, and Labor Leader, Anthony Albanese, are being welcomed by the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA).

SHPA CEO, Kristen Michaels, said Labor's policy of cutting the co-payment to a maximum of \$30 per prescription - \$2.50 less than the Coalition's proposed rate - would deliver savings of \$150 for Australians taking regular PBS-listed medicines.

"With the rising costs of living we know many Australians, particularly our most vulnerable patients – those belonging to lower socioeconomic groups, and those who suffer from multiple chronic conditions – are increasingly struggling to afford medicines.

"Hospital Pharmacists are responsible for 24% of all PBS expenditure, supplying just under five million PBS prescriptions

annually to patients, and these significant figures continue to grow year on year.

"Hospital Pharmacists and their healthcare colleagues, who are keenly aware of the barriers patients face when attempting to receive timely and quality access to life-saving medicines, welcome this bipartisan support for guaranteeing significant savings for PBS medicines.

"We welcome the bipartisan support to further reduce co-payment amounts for PBS medicines and improved medicines affordability for patients, many of whom are still required to pay well above standard co-payment amounts for non-PBS medicines.

"This will inevitably reduce preventable admissions and keep more Australians out of the hospital system."

However, an article published across *News Corp* titles noted that the proposed \$10 to \$12.50 cuts to the general co-payment would



impact fewer than 3% of patients, with many of the most commonly prescribed medicines listed on the PBS costing less than \$30.

**MEANWHILE**, it is unclear whether there could be unintended consequences stemming from the policy shift, which could result in patients paying more for PBS listed medicines that pharmacies can currently discount.

However, both the Coalition and Labor have stated that, "all scripts currently counting towards a patient's safety net will continue to do so".



## Dispensary Corner

**FISH** may be a reliable source of Omega-3, but your next serving of fish and chips may expose you to an adverse drug reaction.

A study of South Florida bonefish found the average fish in Florida Bay, Biscayne Bay and the Florida Keys tested positive for seven medications that would almost certainly not be declared by your local fishmonger.

Researchers noted the impact of wastewater containing traces of prescribed substances was a likely source of the medications found in the fish.

They also reported that the high level of pharmaceutical waste in the waters off Florida was a factor in depleting fish numbers, while exposure to the drugs may also be stunting the growth of bonefish.

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▼ This vaccine is provisionally approved and is subject to additional monitoring in Australia. This will allow quick identification of new safety information. Healthcare professionals are asked to report any suspected adverse events at [www.tga.gov.au/reporting-problems](http://www.tga.gov.au/reporting-problems).

**References:** 1. Moderna Data on File. 2. Spikevax Product Information, 18 February 2022.

3. <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-your-vaccination/booster-doses#winter-dose>. Accessed 25 March 2022.

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## Colloquium theme revealed

**ENLIGHTEN**, empower and emancipate - planting the seeds to future proof our professions, will be the theme of this year's Australian Pharmacy Council Interprofessional Colloquium conference.

The event will be held on 08 Sep at the Rydges Hotel, World Square, Sydney.

[CLICK HERE](#) to register.

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## Flu risks very real: Sanofi

**SLOW** uptake of influenza vaccines across Australia could leave the country exposed to a severe flu season experts warn.

The *With Vaccine Influenza Report Card* from Sanofi Australia and New Zealand, revealed that as of 24 Apr, there had been 2,714 cases of the flu identified, with 49 hospitalisations this year, up from seven last year.

The report noted that the vaccination coverage rate is currently at 11%, lagging behind the 34% rate recorded in 2021 - significantly down on 2020, when 60% of the population had a flu shot.

South Australia currently has the highest flu vaccination rate at 16% as of 02 May, followed by ACT, where 15% of the population have had their flu jab, while the Northern Territory has the lowest uptake, with 6% currently immunised against the virus.

Flu vaccination uptake among Indigenous Australians has fallen from 25% in 2021, to 5% this year.



Sanofi ANZ Country Medical Lead, Dr Iris Depaz, voiced concern over the sluggish uptake of vaccines.

"Australians need to recognise the risk that influenza poses to individual and community health, and take action to protect themselves and their loved ones," Dr Depaz said.

The report also found that the majority of Australians who got a flu shot last year, received it through a general practice clinic, while one-in-five had it had at their workplace, and 13% went to a community pharmacy to have the jab administered.

## Sigma renews PharmX agreement

**PHARMACY** software provider, Corum Group, has confirmed that Sigma Healthcare has signed a new five-year deal to continue to use the PharmX platform.

In a statement to the Australian Securities Exchange (ASX) this morning, Corum reported that the new agreement came into effect on 01 Apr 2022, for an initial term of five years, with a rolling term for a further three years.

Corum Executive Chair, Nick England, said the long-term deal was an important development for both businesses.

"We view this as an endorsement of the recent investments we have made in PharmX and our development plans going forward," he said.

"In addition to the signing of the agreements with wholesalers, Symbion and ProPharma as previously announced, this agreement further cements PharmX's position as the leading gateway linking pharmacies to wholesalers and suppliers.

"It provides Corum Group security to continue investing to develop innovative services on the platform."

## Guild Update

### Blood pressure checks

**AUSTRALIANS**, are being urged to get a blood pressure check at their local pharmacy this month as the key step in reducing their risk of stroke.

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is the greatest modifiable risk factor for stroke. A quick and painless blood pressure check can be all it takes for someone to change their lifestyle and reduce their stroke risk.

Stroke Foundation Chief Executive Officer Sharon McGowan says high blood pressure often goes undiagnosed as it has no immediate symptoms. Over time it puts extra stress on blood vessel walls and can cause them to narrow or break down, eventually leading to a stroke.

"If there is one thing that we have learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that people are keen and able to manage their risk of exposure to illness. We want to apply that mindset to stroke prevention," McGowan said.

Pharmacy Guild of Australia's National President, Trent Twomey, said most pharmacies provide blood pressure checks "because we recognise just how important keeping an eye on your blood pressure is".



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