

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features two pages of news.

VAD for teens

THE ACT Human Rights Commission has called for teenagers to be allowed to access voluntary assisted dying, arguing that capping the scheme at the age of 18 infringes on young people's right to receive healthcare "without discrimination".

ACT Human Rights Minister Tara Cheyne told *The Australian* in Jun she was considering allowing teenagers as young as 14 to access the euthanasia scheme.

The controversial push was later abandoned with the promise to review the age limit after three years.

The territory's Human Rights Commissioner, Penelope Mathew, Children and Young People Commissioner Jodie Griffiths-Cook and Discrimination, Disability, Health and Community Services Commissioner Karen Toohey have argued that terminally-ill minors should have the right to "voluntarily end their life with dignity in the same circumstances as adults".

Anti-euthanasia advocate Brendan Long said it was "scandalous that an agency funded by ACT taxpayers is advocating for children to be offered assisted suicide".

"It gives mixed messages as we seek to fight the epidemic of youth suicide," he said.

The ACT Labor-Greens govt's voluntary assisted dying framework, which is being examined by a parliamentary committee, will form the foundation of the most liberal scheme in the country if it becomes law.

It doesn't have a requirement for a predicted time of death and includes provisions that allows social workers and counsellors to initiate conversations about euthanasia.

Scripts for vaping begin

FROM the start of this year, every doctor and nurse practitioner will be able to prescribe therapeutic vaping products dispensed only through pharmacies, where clinically appropriate, with the commencement of a new Special Access Scheme pathway.

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) is undertaking a comprehensive review of the *Supporting smoking cessation: A guide for health professionals* to ensure it is up-to-date and in line with best practice.

These updates will incorporate guidance on vaping cessation strategies, including the provision of support to young people.

Draft interim guidance reflecting the changes are now available.

The Govt has committed \$29.5 million over four years for specialised programs and health service expansions to meet increased demand to support people to quit smoking and vaping arising from the new tobacco and vaping reforms (PD 11 Dec).

These include new clinical guidance for health professionals on smoking and vaping cessation, building on the RACGP's work as well as the creation of an online cessation hub that contains



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information, tools, resources and linkages to direct people to the support mechanisms to assist them to quit smoking and vaping.

The redevelopment of the My Quit Buddy app will also provide both smoking and vaping cessation support, as will the expansion of state and territory Quitline services to support equitable access across the country.

In addition, the Quit Centre has been funded until 2025 to develop and deliver training, resources, and tools for health professionals. JG

NIP vaccines payments have started

FROM 01 Jan, participating pharmacies are receiving a payment of \$18.85 per vaccination for administering National Immunisation Program (NIP) vaccines (PD 06 Dec).

The payment only applies to NIP vaccines that are administered in a pharmacy setting to individuals aged five years and older.

NIP vaccines that can be administered by pharmacies are determined by individual state and territory legislation.

This program will protect the general public from vaccine preventable diseases by making vaccines more affordable and easier for patients to access, stated the Dept of Health.

The National Immunisation

Program Vaccinations in Pharmacy (NIPVIP) registration and claiming is available via the Pharmacy Programs Administrator (PPA) Portal.

NIPVIP Service Provider registration is separate from any state or territory specific registration that may be required by pharmacies to administer NIP vaccines, explained PPA.

Pharmacies must ensure they are approved to administer NIP vaccines by their state or territory Health Department prior to registering for the Program, stated the pharmacy administrator.

Find out more on the NIP vaccines, payments with no out-of-pocket costs, FAQs, and program rules [HERE](#).

Solbari gets \$10m

A MELBOURNE-based company looking to combat the risk of skin cancer by selling ultra-protective clothing worldwide has secured \$10 million in funding from the Australian Business Growth Fund (ABGF), reported *Business News Australia*.

Established in 2014 by CEO Johanna Young, Solbari sells a range of sun-protective clothing, hats and accessories, all of which are rated Ultra Protection Factor 50+.

To date, the brand has sold to more than 300,000 customers across 160 countries.

The capital injection from ABGF will fuel the company's local and global expansion plans, which include building on its presence in the US, Canada, New Zealand, and the UK.

Solbari is also looking to target younger Australians and grow its wholesale market presence, which currently makes up 10% of the business.

"ABGF's support will ensure our journey as a global leader in sun protection continues, further enabling our mission to empower people to live a sun-smart life," said Young.

According to Melanoma Institute Australia, the nation has one of the highest melanoma rates in the world, with one person diagnosed every 30 minutes and one death every six hours.

This is an issue that is close to Young, who left her career as an investment banker to start Solbari after her husband was confronted with his own risk of skin cancer.

"Many Australians do not apply enough sunscreen, forget to reapply, or neglect to use other sun protection measures," commented Young.

"I found that Australians were missing the education piece about prevention, and realised the critical need for accessible, well made and reliable sun-protective clothing," she added.



Dispensary Corner

NEW Year resolutions for achieving weight loss are at the top of many pharmacy customers' lists.

However, in a digital world, where people increasingly rely on the internet for food-related and nutrition-related information, a recent *JAMA* report showed that almost one-half of online, nutrition-related information was inaccurate or of low quality.

The ability of AI chatbots to streamline the navigation of public information has transformed electronic health but not necessarily in a good way.

The study investigated the reliability of AI in providing the energy and macronutrient content of 222 food items using different languages (English and Traditional Chinese) as inputs.

AI chatbots overestimated protein needs, and it remains unclear how well they can handle nutrition-related questions, meaning pharmacists and staff remain as the go to source to handle such queries.

Legionnaires' outbreak

NSW Health put out an urgent warning last week to people who have visited the Sydney CBD in the past 10 days to look out for symptoms of Legionnaires' disease after seven people were diagnosed in the past three weeks.

The warning period included Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Eve, stated NSW Health.

The seven people, three women and four men ranging in age from their 20s to 70s, independently visited various CBD locations between Bathurst Street, Sussex Street, Elizabeth Street and Circular Quay, *SMH* has reported.

All seven people have been identified with the Legionella bacteria that causes Legionnaires' disease, which is often associated with contaminated cooling towers of large buildings.

People can be exposed to the bacteria if contaminated water particles from a cooling system are emitted into the air and breathed in as Legionnaires' disease cannot be spread from person to person.

Symptoms of Legionnaires' disease can develop up to 10 days from the time of exposure to contaminated water particles in the air and include fever, chills, a cough



and shortness of breath and may lead to severe chest infections such as pneumonia.

Pharmacists can inform their customers to watch out for these symptoms, with treatment often involving antibiotics administered in hospital, as those with underlying lung conditions and smokers are most at risk.

NSW Health officers are apparently working with the City of Sydney Council to inspect cooling towers in the city for traces of the disease and are reviewing maintenance records of cooling towers to help identify possible contaminated buildings.

A NSW Health fact sheet on Legionnaires' disease stated that 10% of those who contract the disease die despite treatment. *JG*

Mass vaccinations

THE city of Dourados in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul last week began the country's first mass vaccination against the dengue virus, *Reuters* has reported.

Brazil registered 1.6 million cases of dengue in 2023, an increase of 15.8% over the same period last year, according to data from the health ministry.

The number of deaths caused by the infection grew 5.4% in the period to 1,053.

The initiative aims to vaccinate around 150,000 residents of the city between the ages of four and 59 using the recently approved Japanese drugmaker Takeda's (4502.T) vaccine branded as Qdenga.

Distribution has started of the first batch of 90,000 doses already delivered by Takeda as part of an agreement with the South American city.

The vaccination schedule requires a second dose in three months.

The dengue infection, passed on by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito can cause mild-to-severe disease, and death.

Asbestos ban improves survival rates

DATA on 60 years' worth of Western Australian cases of the lung disease mesothelioma, which is primarily caused by asbestos exposure, suggested that an Australia-wide ban on asbestos may be working with a fall in the incidence of DIY/renovation exposure.

The study looked at 2,796 cases of mesothelioma with around 85% occurring in men.

The average age at diagnosis

was 70 and survival times have doubled over the 60 years, from around six months to a year.

Home renovation was the primary exposure in around 8% of cases, but the number of cases linked to renovations and DIY decreased after a peak in the 2005-2009 period.

Australia also last year introduced a ban on engineered stone products that produce deadly silica dust (*PD* 21 Aug).

Quest on to regenerate insulin in cells

AUSTRALIAN researchers are zeroing in on the ultimate quest to regenerate insulin in pancreatic stem cells and replace the need for regular insulin injections for patients.

Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute researchers have demonstrated in the *Nature* scientific journal that newly made insulin cells can respond to glucose and produce insulin following stimulation

with two US Food and Drug Administration-approved drugs in as little as 48 hours.

Further, they confirmed this pathway of awakening the insulin-producing cells is viable in age groups from seven to 61 years, providing much-needed insights into the mechanisms underlying the regeneration of beta cells.

To learn more about this emerging research **CLICK HERE**.