

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features two pages of news, plus a full page from Pointrs.

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Autism initiative

FLINDERS University's Autism Research Laboratory has received nearly \$850,000 in funding to launch a new autism research initiative, bolstered by a \$500,000 donation from an anonymous donor and university support over five years.

The initiative aims to serve as a global hub, fostering connections between academia, healthcare, industry, and autistic organisations to accelerate research and develop tangible support for the 75 million people worldwide living with autism.

Flinders University Prof Robyn Young, who leads the project, highlighted its potential.

"This funding allows us to expand our research, enhance early detection, and improve outcomes for autistic individuals," said Young.

The program will also focus on identifying autistic women, understanding co-occurring health conditions, help individuals navigate the criminal justice system, and drive forward evidence-based approaches to support the autism community.



AdPha urges HTA reform

HOSPITAL pharmacists say their contribution to more than 10 recommendations in the Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Review marks a crucial step towards improved access to medicines and health technologies (PD breaking news).

The sector's peak body, Advanced Pharmacy Australia's (AdPha) President Tom Simpson, and CEO Kristin Michaels, welcomed the report at its launch by Assistant Minister for Health Ged Kearney, at PharmAus24, this week.

Simpson (pictured) highlighted the vital role hospital pharmacists play in managing nearly a quarter of PBS medicines expenditure which equates to over \$3 billion annually.

"Our members work in some of the most challenging interfaces of patient care and health technology funding," said Simpson.

"Undertaking formulary reviews on new medicines, considering



high cost funding approvals for individual patients, or at the bedside helping clinicians and patients to negotiate complex medicines access agreements.

"We are at the forefront of new medicines access, and see the need to ensure no patient misses out on life-changing therapies."

Simpson stressed that current funding pathways create access inequities, as hospitals struggle to cover therapy costs, leading to a postcode lottery.

"These gaps must be closed to align with HTA reforms and end the postcode lottery," said Simpson.

He called for patient-centred funding models that prioritise clinical need without location constraints, and is looking forward to participating in the Government's implementation group to guide HTA reform. JG

APP2025 savings

EARLY bird registration is now open for the 2025 Australian Pharmacy Professional Conference and Trade Exhibition (APP2025), set for 20-22 Mar on the Gold Coast.

Delegates can save up to \$120 on full registration, which includes access to all sessions, recordings, the trade show, and welcome reception.

The first 200 registrants who book will receive an extra 10% off the early bird price using code 'FIRST200'.

"As the premier pharmacy event, APP2025 is not to be missed," said conference Chairman Kos Sclavos.

"The theme 'Unlocking your opportunities', reflects the industry's future as we navigate significant changes like the 8CPA and new trials."

APP2025, the largest pharmacy conference in the Southern Hemisphere, promises a packed three-day program with over 450 trade exhibits and will unveil its full schedule in Nov.

Data-led solutions

PHARMAPROGRAMS has extended its partnership with NostraData to enhance patient programs by leveraging advanced data solutions.

The collaboration aims to streamline professional services and improve health outcomes by identifying patients who could benefit from clinical interventions.

Nader Mitri, GM of PharmaPrograms, said, "by combining our service expertise with NostraData's sophisticated algorithms, we aim to deliver industry-leading programs that make a difference".

NostraData's GM Nick Biggs, added, "our analytics helps identify patients for targeted interventions, turning data-directed insights into actionable programs".

The partnership will continue to focus on data analytics-driven insights to personalise care, optimise service delivery, and empower pharmacies with healthcare solutions.



Vapes crackdown

OVER 5.2 million illicit vapes and vaping products were seized by the TGA and the Australian Border Force in 2024, including two million since new laws took effect on 1 Jul.

The reported value of the seized products is estimated at more than \$155 million.

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Dispensary Corner

IN A surprising twist, researchers have found that laughing might just be as effective as eye drops for treating dry eye disease.

The study, published in *The BMJ*, suggests that instead of reaching for eye drops, you might just need to crack a few jokes to keep your eyes moist.

Dry eye disease is no laughing matter, affecting around 360 million people worldwide with symptoms like scratchy, irritated eyes.

But this study suggests that laughter therapy could offer much-needed relief.

Researchers gathered 283 participants, handed half of them 0.1% sodium hyaluronic acid eye drops, and told the other half to laugh like their lives - and their eyes - depended on it.

The laughter group watched a video and repeated the phrases "Hee hee hee, hah hah hah, cheese cheese cheese," 30 times, while a face recognition app made sure they were really getting into it.

The eye drops' group, on the other hand, just applied their medication four times a day like ordinary folks.

After eight weeks, both groups showed improvement, with the laughers seeing nearly the same benefits as those using eye drops.

Plus, the chuckling crew reported better tear stability, healthier eye glands, and a boost in mental health.

It turns out, laughter really might be the best medicine, at least for your eyes.

Dementia meds use rising

THE latest *Dementia in Australia* report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reveals a significant increase in the use of dementia-specific prescription medications.

Nearly 688,000 scripts were dispensed to around 72,400 Australians aged 30 and over in 2022-23, marking a 46% increase from just over 472,000 prescriptions in 2013-14.

"The rise in prescriptions suggests increased awareness of dementia management options," said AIHW spokesperson Melanie Dunford.

Despite no cure for dementia, these medications help manage symptoms and support independence and quality of life, she added.

Hospitalisations due to dementia have also climbed by 24%, reaching



26,300 in 2022-23, although rates adjusted for age have remained stable, according to AIHW.

Dunford noted that dementia is not a part of ageing but is increasingly prevalent with Australia's ageing population, highlighting the growing need for dementia care services.

Dementia is responsible for about one in 11 deaths in Australia, totalling 17,800 in 2022, and is the second leading cause of death after coronary heart disease.

With the number of Australians living with dementia predicted to more than double to 849,300 by 2058, Dunford emphasised the importance of ongoing monitoring and support for those affected. *JG*

\$10m for genomics

CABRINI Health and Monash University are helping to transform cancer care in Victoria with a \$10 million donation from the PMF Foundation.

The funding will establish a comprehensive genomic testing program at Cabrini, offering precision treatment for up to 2,000 additional patients each year.

Inspired by a patient treated by Prof Gary Richardson, Cabrini's Group Director of Research, the donation aims to extend the life-saving care to more cancer patients.

The initiative, starting in 2025, will help reduce testing wait times and costs, making advanced cancer care accessible to more Victorians, including those previously unable to afford it.

Rethink vulnerability

OFF the back of R U OK? Day, it is crucial to recognise workplace loneliness among pharmacists and colleagues, said Jenny Kirschner, founder of the PALS (Pharmacy Addressing Loneliness and Social isolation) training program.

"Unlike depression, loneliness signals the need for meaningful connections, and affects all employees, regardless of age, gender, or seniority, and is especially prevalent among healthcare professionals and students," Kirschner told *Pharmacy Daily*.

Research links workplace loneliness to lower job performance, increased errors, strained relationships, and poor mental health.

"For pharmacists, high burnout, professional isolation, and stigma around help-seeking can exacerbate loneliness," said Kirschner.

Developed with the PSA, the PALS training program on loneliness (*PD* 06 Aug) addresses these challenges, helping workplaces to recognise the condition, encourage vulnerability, and support social connection.



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