

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features two pages of news.

Immunisation zoster update

THE zoster (herpes zoster) chapter of the Australian Immunisation Handbook has been updated to reflect the removal of Zostavax.

Shingrix is now the only available vaccine in Australia to protect against zoster (shingles), and is funded under the National Immunisation Program (NIP) for all adults aged ≥65 years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged ≥50 years and selected groups aged ≥18 years with moderate or severe immunocompromise.

The Zostavax vaccine is no longer available in Australia and all remaining stock will have expired and should be disposed of accordingly.

See the zoster chapter [HERE](#).

Sigma looking up

SIGMA Healthcare has upgraded its full year normalised EBIT guidance for the year ending 31 Jan 2025 to \$64-\$70 million, up from the \$50-\$60 million range previously guided in Sep 2024.

The new Chemist Warehouse supply contract has been largely to thank for the improved operational performance, Sigma said.

Women's health meds added to PBS

FROM 01 Mar 2025, women will have cheaper access to newer generation oral contraceptives and menopause hormone therapies when they are listed on the PBS.

The initiative is one of several Labor women's health measures announced over the weekend.

The new PBS listings will be implemented now, while other measures will be introduced if Labor is re-elected.

The listing of Yaz and Yasmin (drospirenone with ethinylestradiol) is expected to benefit around 50,000 women each year who will now pay \$126.40 a year (or \$30.80 a year with a concession card) instead of around \$380 per year.

And around 150,000 women are expected to benefit from three new menopausal hormone therapies to be listed on the PBS: Estrogel (estradiol), Prometrium

(progesterone) and Estrogel Pro (estradiol and progesterone).

This gives women experiencing ongoing supply issues with other MHT products an additional option without additional cost - instead of paying between \$400 and \$670 per year, they'll pay \$380 per year, or \$92 with a concession card.

Labor has also pledged \$100 million for two national trials that will make it cheaper and easier for many women to get treatment for uncomplicated urinary tract infections (UTIs) and over-the-counter contraceptives from the local community pharmacy.

"Both community pharmacists and health consumers will welcome the consistent national approach in the delivery of primary healthcare services that are critical for Australian women," said Australasian College of Pharmacy



(College) CEO Amanda Seeto.

The College said all community pharmacists are "strongly encouraged" to enrol in its Uncomplicated Cystitis Training and Prescribing Hormonal Contraceptives Course, which are available via the College website.

However, the Australian Medical Association has criticised the move, saying GPs are best placed to diagnose and treat UTIs and to initiate oral contraceptives, noting that the TGA has previously said the risks of the Pill mean it should only be prescribed by a doctor. KB

New Darwin-based training program to launch

PHARMACISTS across the Northern Territory will be able to access training enabling them to treat a wider variety of conditions, thanks to the launch of the Graduate Certificate of Advanced Practice and Prescribing for Pharmacists program at James Cook University in Darwin.

The program includes residential components in Darwin, a welcome move that makes it more accessible for local pharmacists.

"This is a significant milestone for healthcare in the Northern Territory," said Peter Hatswell, President of the Pharmacy Guild

of Australia, NT Branch.

"The training will equip our pharmacists with the skills and knowledge needed to provide a wider range of health services, improving access to care for all Territorians," Hatswell continued.

The NT Government is providing \$1 million to subsidise the training, which the Guild said demonstrates the government's dedication to enhancing healthcare accessibility in the Territory and fulfilling its Jul 2024 election promise.

"We're thrilled to see the CLP government following through

on their commitment to expand pharmacists' scope of practice," Hatswell said.

"This program will allow pharmacists to treat up to 21 conditions, including ear infections, asthma, and minor wounds, significantly reducing the burden on our healthcare system," he added.

The Community Pharmacy Full Scope of Practice program regulatory changes are expected to be implemented by August 2025, paving the way for expanded healthcare services in Northern Territory pharmacies.



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Adrian Staltari
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Dispensary Corner

CANDLES are bad for your brain power, according to new research from Birmingham.

Scented candles, birthday cake candles, beeswax candles... it doesn't matter what type - it's the indoor air pollution resulting from the smoke of blown-out candles that does the damage.

The study included 26 people who sat in a room with a blown-out candle for an hour, and again on a different day in the same room with clean air.

The study volunteers carried out a set of cognitive tests, before and after entering the room in each scenario.

After inhaling candle smoke, they did worse in a test of their ability to focus on a picture and ignore distractions.

"Our study provides compelling evidence that even short-term exposure to air pollution can have immediate negative effects on brain functions essential for daily activities," said study co-author Dr Thomas Faherty.

So, don't try this at home, folks - especially if you need to think.

Paramedic scope expanded

THE Pharmacy Guild of Australia, Victoria Branch has welcomed new laws allowing paramedic practitioners to deliver urgent care and prescribe scheduled medicines.

The passing of the State Government's *Paramedic Practitioners Bill 2024* means paramedics will be able to assess, diagnose and treat patients in the field as well as make clinical decisions, providing Victorian patients with immediate treatment and easing the pressure on emergency departments.

"The expanded scope of practice of paramedic practitioners is another important step towards improved access to healthcare for patients in Victoria," said Pharmacy Guild of Australia, Victoria Branch President, George Tambassis.

The new laws were announced last year after the Victorian Community Pharmacist Statewide Pilot was declared a success, and was subsequently extended until 30 Jun 2025 (PD 06 Jun 2024).

The first 12 months of the pilot have seen more than 20,000 Victorians receive treatment conveniently and affordably at their local community pharmacy for everyday health conditions, including uncomplicated urinary

tract infections (UTIs), oral contraceptive resupply, shingles and flare-ups of mild plaque psoriasis, and travel health vaccinations.

"The pilot is an important first step for community pharmacists to deliver more for Victorian patients, [who] should be able to access the same services that are already available at community pharmacies in other states and territories," Tambassis said.

He added that the Guild is actively working with the Victorian Government to enable pharmacists to practice at their full scope and provide prescribing and clinical services to patients for 24 everyday health conditions.

Authorising pharmacists to practice at full scope would align not just with the expanded role of paramedic practitioners, but also with reforms introduced by the state last year allowing authorised midwives to prescribe Schedule 2, 3, 4, and 8 medicines.

"Enabling a range of healthcare professionals - paramedics, midwives and community pharmacists - to do more for patients will significantly enhance healthcare outcomes for Victorians while taking pressure off our healthcare system," said Tambassis. *JM*

ACCC rejects baby milk code

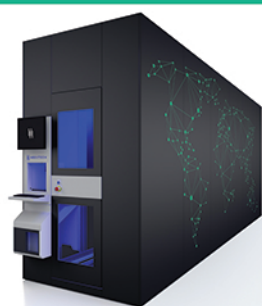
THE Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC) has denied reauthorisation sought by the Infant Nutrition Council for its industry code on the marketing of infant formula.

The Infant Nutrition Council was seeking authorisation to continue to implement the 'Marketing in Australia of Infant Formula: Manufacturers & Importers' Agreement, and its associated guidelines for a further five years.

The ACCC believes the effectiveness of the agreement is being undermined by several factors including its voluntary nature, its limited scope, and restrictions on its ability to capture the breadth of modern digital marketing methods.

This means the agreement's claimed public benefits are unlikely to arise, or are likely to occur with or without it in place, the ACCC said.

The ACCC also considered that the code is likely to result in some public detriment through reduced competition between infant formula manufacturers and importers.



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