

4 ways to help build strong bones



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Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news.

APP2025 top tip

AMONG the Chairman's Top 20 sessions for APP2025 is 'Digital Health: The next 5 years for pharmacy', on the afternoon of Thu 20 Mar.

With a \$1.1 billion investment to update the digital health infrastructure and to transform My Health Record into a more data-rich platform, the session will explore the implications for pharmacists with the upgraded My Health Record.

Panellists, including representatives from the Department of Health and the Australian Digital Health Agency, will also look at how the evolving digital medication platforms seek to further improve medication safety.

Call for greater medicine affordability

AS PATIENTS struggle to pay for their medicine, the Pharmacy Guild of Australia has urged the Government to act to make medicines more affordable.

The call comes as mounting evidence shows the link between cost-of-living pressures and medicine affordability, with Productivity Commission Chair Danielle Wood commenting that more people are delaying filling prescriptions due to cost.

"It's clear the government needs to take action to reduce the cost of medication to show voters they are serious about tackling the rising cost of living," said pharmacist and Pharmacy Guild of Australia National Councillor Mario Barone.

"Australians are being forced to make tough choices between filling prescriptions and paying the rent, buying groceries and putting petrol in the car," Barone pointed out.

"We know what happens when people can't afford their medicine - they get sicker," he continued.

"Often there are complications that mean time off work, time in hospital and time recovering."

Research by the Guild shows that more than one in five people have not filled a prescription in the past three years because of cost, rising to one in three people in parts of regional Australia.

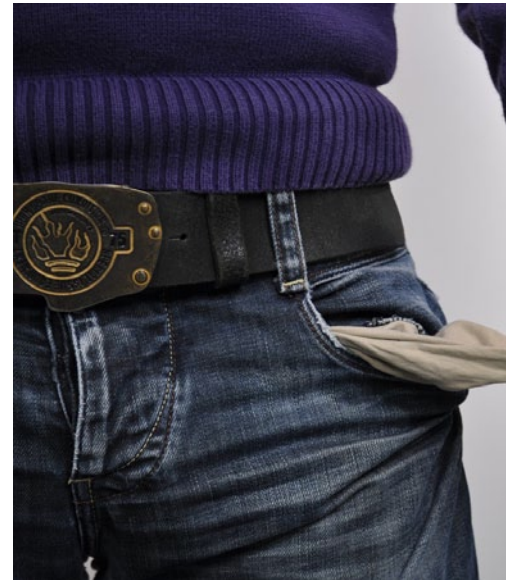
Women, those with dependants, and younger people were more likely to skip a prescription because of cost.

The Guild is calling for the Government to reduce the general co-payment as part of its Affordable Medicine Now campaign.

"This non-inflationary measure would reduce out-of-pocket prescription costs for patients," Barone said.

"Community pharmacists see patients struggling to afford their medicine every day," he continued.

"The Government can, and should, take action to address these challenges and make sure medicine stops being a luxury item." KB



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Dispensary Corner

CAN machines be therapists?

According to US researchers, AI such as ChatGPT could be as good as, if not better, than psychotherapists for mental health therapy.

The team presented over 800 people with the responses from ChatGPT or real therapists on 18 couples' therapy case studies.

They found that while the participants were able to notice a difference in language patterns, they were rarely able to identify whether the responses were written by the AI or a human.

Additionally, they found that the AI responses generally rated higher in core psychotherapy guiding principles, which help ensure clients are treated with respect and have the space to make their own choices.

Wegovy gets TGA approval for CVD

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has approved Wegovy 2.4mg (semaglutide) to be used as a complementary therapy for reducing major adverse cardiovascular events, such as cardiovascular death, non-fatal myocardial infarction (heart attack), or non-fatal stroke.

The approval follows findings from an international study involving more than 17,000 participants across 41 countries, including Australia, which showed that Wegovy reduced cardiovascular events by 20% in people with pre-existing heart disease who were overweight or obese but did not have diabetes.

Wegovy is the same drug as Ozempic, but is indicated for chronic weight management, whereas Ozempic is indicated for management of type 2 diabetes.

They also have different dosages and delivery devices.

Both drugs are manufactured by Novo Nordisk.

"This approval highlights the critical role of overweight and obesity as major drivers of heart disease - on par with cholesterol, blood pressure, diabetes and smoking," said cardiologist Professor Stephen Nicholls, Director of the Victorian Heart Institute at Monash University.

"It reinforces that these risks can be actively reduced with targeted therapies," he added.

Professor Nicholls was the leader of the Australian arm of the international study, and said the trial demonstrated that the drug's cardiovascular benefits extend beyond weight loss.

"This drug also positively impacts inflammation, blood lipids and blood pressure, which are all crucial in preventing heart attacks and strokes," he said.

"What this tells us is that if you have heart disease and are overweight or obese, not only are



you at a higher risk of another cardiovascular event, but that risk can now be significantly reduced.

"This is a groundbreaking result for patients."

For many, however, the benefits will be unattainable - the drug is not PBS-listed and costs up to \$500 per month via private prescription.

Novo Nordisk has indicated it will reapply for PBS listing in light of the new TGA approval. KB

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Australian Prescriber marks 50 years

AUSTRALIAN Prescriber is celebrating its 50 year anniversary this year, thanking its 100,000 plus healthcare subscribers for their continued support over the years.

The publication is a free, national, peer-reviewed journal providing critical commentary on drugs and therapeutics, providing independent, reliable and accessible information on the quality use of medicines to support clinical decision-making

and improve patient outcomes.

"While there has been much growth and change during this time, our purpose - to help health professionals make informed choices when prescribing - remains the same," wrote Managing Editor Rosie Scott in an editorial commemorating the anniversary.

First published by the Department of Health and then NPS MedicineWise, Australian Prescriber has been published by Therapeutic Guidelines Ltd since 2023, and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.

The move to Therapeutic Guidelines Ltd, which also publishes the *Therapeutic Guidelines*, a point-of-care clinical decision support database, provided opportunity for continued growth and quality, with collaboration across publications and with subject matter experts.

"Recognising the custodial responsibility, Therapeutic

Guidelines Limited is committed to continue to evolve, rejuvenate and grow the publication for the benefit of all healthcare professionals," wrote Scott.

The journal was recently indexed by the International OA Journal Recommended List, a list of open access journals that meet international standards for academic integrity and quality.

"It is wonderful to see the positive impact of the continuous work that is done to achieve our purpose of helping health professionals make informed decisions when prescribing," wrote Scott. KB



Mobile education for rural HPs

PFIZER Australia has announced a partnership with Heart of Australia (HoA) mobile health service, to expand its GP Education Program with the aim of improving healthcare delivery in rural and remote parts of Australia.

The HoA GP Education Program provides educational sessions for rural and remote healthcare professionals, including GPs, nurses and pharmacists, offering them the opportunity to learn from specialists and network face-to-face with colleagues.

The sessions focus on increasing knowledge and skills to help improve healthcare services and outcomes in local communities, particularly in rural and First Nations areas.

The program covers a broad range of topics, including cardiology, endocrinology, respiratory and occupational health, with a focus on specific health concerns in the communities it visits.

Utilising custom-designed Heart Trucks, the HoA program has created a more accessible pathway to medical specialists for those who are most at risk for chronic disease.

Each truck is capable of delivering comprehensive radiology, respiratory and specialist services to even the most remote locations across the country.

"We're supporting their patients with ongoing education as well as providing access to equipment many remote medical practices don't have - it can be life-saving for many patients," Pfizer stated.



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Hundreds take up free meningococcal B vax

ALMOST 1,300 eligible young people in the Northern Territory have received the free Meningococcal B vaccine since the program launched on 01 Jan, announced Steve Edgington, NT Minister for Health.

That included around 1,200 infants aged between six weeks and two years, and around 100 adolescents aged between 14 and 19 years who accessed the vaccine ahead of the start of the 2025 NT School Immunisation Program (PD 24 Jan).

The Minister said there was

strong interest in the free meningococcal B vaccine, and he encouraged more eligible Territory families to take part.

"Around 4,200 babies and 18,500 adolescents across the Territory are eligible to access the free vaccine and I hope every eligible Territory family will access this vital protection for free," said Edgington.

Prior to the free vaccines program, vaccines cost \$200 per dose, with babies requiring three doses and adolescents needing two doses.