

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features four pages of news plus a full page from TerryWhite Chemmart.

COVID efforts earn award

PHARMACIST, Grant Oswald, has been presented the 2022 Isaac Region Australia Day Mayor's Award, for his efforts to support the community of Clermont, Queensland, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Guardian Pharmacy Clermont proprietor, who played a key role in supporting the COVID-19 vaccination program in the area, said it was an honour to receive the award.

"The Clermont community means everything to me, so it's always been important to me as a community pharmacy owner, to be able to provide trusted care, even through the tough times," he said.

"As the only pharmacy in town, we've had the pleasure to get to know our patients on a personal level, so when they do come into the pharmacy, we can give them the one-to-one care that they're looking for.

"Receiving the Isaac Region Mayor's Award means the world to me – to have the support of the local council, and the community at large, is an honour."

ACCC's RAT rates wide of the mark

CLAIMS that wholesale prices for COVID-19 rapid antigen tests (RATs) are between \$3.82 and \$11.42, do not tally with reality, Pharmacy Guild of Australia Western Australian Branch President, Andrew Ngeow, says.

He noted that the figures reported by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) in its latest RAT pricing update, were based on information from the period from 29 Dec 2021 to 14 Jan.

"The figure of \$3.82 is so far removed from the situation in WA that it's not funny," he said.

"We need to remember that until 10 Jan, WA prohibited the use of RATs which, unless exempted, could result in fines of up to \$20,000 for an individual and \$100,000 for businesses.

"Since 10 Jan however, pharmacies across WA have been inundated with requests for RATs although given the level of Australia-wide demand, many will not have the

supply to fully meet patients' needs for perhaps a month.

"Western Australians are both nervous about the looming entry of COVID-19 into the State and frustrated that they are unable to obtain RATs.

"Pharmacies are doing what they can to secure supplies of RATs and quite frankly, they don't need this type of misinformation being put out by the ACCC.

"All Western Australian pharmacies would welcome immediate access to RATs at under four dollars a unit, that is very unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future."

Meanwhile, the ACCC update noted that since 25 Dec 2021, the community pharmacy sector has attracted the highest volume of complaints relating to RAT pricing.

Of the 1,309 reports made about RAT prices in pharmacies to the consumer watchdog up until 26 Jan, more than half related to tests being sold for between \$15 and \$25, with the average price in pharmacies



currently around \$21 per test.

ACCC Chair, Rod Sims noted that the Commission had been in contact with the head offices of IGS and BP, after high numbers of reports of tests being sold for more than \$30 each.

However, he noted that the complaints were "limited to a small number of individual stores in these chains, and the majority of stores in those chains had not been the subject of complaints".

TWC support

PHARMACY owners looking to build a strong and successful business can access support and expert advice through the TerryWhite Chemmart network.

The group also offers "reliable wholesaler support with market-leading fulfillment".

See **page five** for more information.

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Guild spends big on Coalition support

DATA released by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) this week, shows Coalition parties enjoyed the lion's share of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia's political donations in the 2020/21 financial year.

The data revealed the Guild spent a total of \$295,149 on contributions to political parties (up from \$214,120 in FY2019/20), with \$206,553 going to branches of the Liberal and National parties, while the Australian Labor Party received \$88,596, across its Federal, Queensland and Western Australian branches.

The Federal branch of the Liberal Party of Australia topped the Guild's list of donations, receiving a total of \$47,700, while the Liberal National Party of Queensland (LNP) was given the second largest sum (\$43,490), with the National Party taking in \$37,580 in contributions from the organisation.

Just under 40% of the Guild's

political spending went to the major parties' Federal branches, with State elections during FY 2020/21 seeing significant funding go to the parties in Queensland and WA.

The Guild gave \$36,821 to Labor in Queensland during the year, with \$31,897 (86.6%) being donated in the lead up to the 31 Oct 2020 election, while close to 60% of the funding given to the LNP was made after the party's electoral defeat.

In WA, where Premier Mark McGowan's Labor won a significant majority, the Guild's spending was reasonably even, with the organisation contributing \$21,575 to Labor, with the Liberal Party's State branch being given \$20,733.

Labor's Federal branch received the largest single donation from the Guild in FY 2020/21, \$27,500, which was given on 18 Mar 2021, with two subsequent contributions being made on 30 Mar 2021 (\$500) and on 02 Jun 2021 (\$2,200).



The Guild also contributed \$25,550 to the Liberal Party of Australia's NSW Division, with the Tasmanian branch receiving a single donation of \$16,500, while the South Australia arm of the party received \$15,000.

Overall the Guild's \$295,149 spending on political donations was the second highest in the last eight years, eclipsed only by the \$773,791 it handed over in FY 2018/19 in the lead up to the last Federal Election.

TGA issues home RAT update

AUSTRALIANS are being advised not to consume food or drink for up to 30 minutes before collecting saliva for a home-use COVID-19 rapid antigen test (RAT).

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) issued the recommendation this morning that eating, drinking, smoking, brushing your teeth or chewing gum, prior to taking a sample, could impact the accuracy of the tests.

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Mid-tier PBS co-payment needed

CALLS for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) general co-payment to be slashed are gathering momentum, with Better Access Australia (BAA), urging the Federal Government to cut patients' out-of-pocket costs.

In its pre-Budget submission released today, the health advocacy group has pushed for the introduction of a "mid-tier co-payment" of \$20, to improve medicines affordability for Australian patients.

Highlighting concerns about the high costs of medicines patients are facing, BAA Chair, Felicity McNeill, noted data released by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia, which revealed one-in-five people aged 18 to 64 years old described prescription medications as "unaffordable" (PD 31 Jan).

"Right now, Australians are paying some of the highest co-payments for subsidised medicines in the world," she said.

"Our PBS system is lacking the nuance of access needed.

"The gap between the concessional and general co-payment both in access and cost has become too stark.



"Over one-in-three scripts on the PBS are now fully funded by patients, and with the Government recently passing legislation to increase the costs patients will be charged for many medicines on top of this \$1.20 price hike, we need to do better for individuals and families falling through this access gap.

"Introducing a mid-tier co-payment better spreads the burden of making medicines affordable between the community and the government."

Under the BAA's proposal families earning less than \$136,000 would be eligible for the \$20 co-payment, while the Guild has called for the general co-payment to be slashed from \$42.50 to \$19, under its Affordable Medication Reform policy (PD 15

Sep 2021).

McNeill also called on the Government to implement a freeze on increases to the concessional and general PBS co-payments, which went up by \$0.20 and \$1.20 on 01 Jan, for the next five years.

"COVID lockdowns have reduced job security and eaten into household savings," she said.

"That's why BAA is also asking the Government to freeze indexation on PBS copayments and safety nets for five years to ensure that while cost of living increases and wages stagnate, the community can still afford their medicines."

TGA safety alert

PATIENTS who have purchased Nham Sam Tuyet Lien Truy Phong Hoan, "miracle pills", are being urged by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) to dispose of them at their local pharmacy.

The TGA found the product, which is not listed on the Australia Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG), contains dexamethasone, chlorphenamine and furosemide, which can be cause serious side effects when taken in combination.

CLICK HERE for more.

RAT suppliers under ACCC's microscope

THE Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is investigating claims that government entities have pressured suppliers to give them priority access to COVID-19 rapid antigen tests (RATs).

In its latest update on RAT pricing, the consumer watchdog noted it was looking into "representations by the number of supplies" suggesting stock was requisitioned by the government agencies, noting the Federal Government has denied such allegations.

ACCC Chair, Rod Sims, said the Commission would seek "to

address any misrepresentations identified" during the investigation.

The ACCC reported that a supplier has publicly retracted on such claim.

"The ACCC takes this opportunity to remind suppliers about the importance of honouring any contractual arrangements for suppliers, and of being honest about the reason why RATs may currently be unavailable," Sims said.

"Suppliers must be able to substantiate any claims they make about test availability, and we are asking them to do so."

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Dispensary Corner

YOU might assume that crashing your car after having a glass or two of whisky and some medications might make an insurance claim a little difficult.

However, Suncorp has been ordered to pay up after initially declining a \$15,000 claim made by a 35-year-old who smashed his Mercedes A45 AMG into a median strip, after enjoying some "free-poured" scotch while at a friend's house.

When police arrived the man had bloodshot eyes and two bottles of gamma-butyrolactone were found in his possession.

The man recorded a breath analysis test for alcohol of 0.07%, above the 0.05% limit at the scene of the accident, but a subsequent test just over an hour later at a police station returned a reading of 0.045%, which allow him to be released without charge.

He then submitted a claim, only for Suncorp to knock it back after a pharmacist hired by the insurer concluded that alcohol was the main contributing factor in causing the accident, and noted that medications may also have impacted his competency behind the wheel, *Insurance News* reported.

However, the Australian Financial Complaints Authority ruled there was not enough evidence to support the assessment that the driver had been affected by alcohol or medication consumption, and ordered the insurer to retrieve the vehicle and arrange for it to be repaired.

Claimants to quit API class action

CLASS action specialist, Levitt Robinson, is set to seek leave to discontinue a case it filed against Australian Pharmaceutical Industries (API) in Victoria's Supreme Court last year (*PD* 12 Oct 2021), on behalf of a number of current and former Priceline Pharmacy franchisees.

The move to abandon the class action was announced in a statement from API to the Australian Securities Exchange (ASX) yesterday.

The company noted that it had "received correspondence from the claimants' legal representatives that they will seek the Court's leave to discontinue the class action".

"API intended to vigorously defend the action, but is pleased that the claims against it will be withdrawn subject to Court

approval in the coming weeks," the company said.

"API remains focused on supporting Priceline Pharmacy franchisees through the current phase of the COVID-19 pandemic as they serve their communities."

Levitt Robinson had initially raised the prospect of bringing a case against API in May 2020, and called on current and former Priceline Pharmacy franchisees to join the suit against the banner group (*PD* 06 May 2020).

The firm alleged that franchise agreements between pharmacy owners and the Priceline banner signed at any time from 18 Nov 2010 onwards, may contain provisions "that may breach the current legislative framework which governs pharmacies in NSW, Queensland and Victoria", which



API has denied.

The decision to pull the pin on the class action suit comes ahead of the expected takeover of API by retail conglomerate, Wesfarmers, which is due to be completed by the end of Mar, subject to being granted approval by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (*PD* 21 Jan).

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