



Today's issue of PD

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See **page five** for more.

Half a million missing out on Safety Net

The Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) is calling for urgent automation of the PBS Safety Net system after it was revealed almost half a million people who qualified for the benefits in 2024 missed out due to the current paper-based tracking system.

The 495,865 people were paying full price for essential medication when they should have received significant discounts, CEO of CHF, Dr Elizabeth Deveny, pointed out.

"The PBS Safety Net is supposed to protect Australians from high medicine costs, but the reality is too many people don't even realise they're eligible," Dr Deveny said.

"We all want to know what benefits we're entitled to - this should be simple."

"The current system is failing hundreds of thousands of Australians who simply don't know it exists, let alone how to track their spending or apply for it."

The current PBS Safety Net system relies on pharmacists or consumers

manually tracking prescriptions, usually requiring people to visit the same pharmacy repeatedly, which is an impractical requirement for many Australians.

"It's 2025, surely we can do better than using a manual paper-based tracking system," Dr Deveny said.

"We wouldn't accept a paper-based system for the Medicare Safety Net, so why do we accept it for the PBS Safety Net?"

Many Australians are struggling with the cost of living, with accounts of people delaying, skipping or rationing their medication just because they cannot afford it, Dr Deveny said.

"Medicine is essential, and no-one should be going without it," Dr Deveny said, adding that "fixing this is a no-brainer."

The number of concessional PBS Safety Net recipients has almost doubled over five years, from 1.2 million in 2019 to 2.2 million in 2024, while general population Safety Net recipients decreased



from around 125,000 to 100,000 over that time.

"We're worried working families and young professionals who earn just enough not to qualify for concession cards are missing out - simply due to a lack of awareness," Dr Deveny said.

"Everybody benefits when Australians can afford the medicines they need, and a healthier population means a stronger economy.

"The government needs to introduce an automated real-time PBS spend tracking system that would automatically apply benefits once consumers hit the threshold, similar to the Medicare Safety Net."

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References: 1. CELEBRES RELIEF® (celecoxib) Product Information. 2. Ekman EF et al. Am J Orthop 2002; 31(8):445-451. 3. Petri M et al. J Rheumatol 2004; 31(8):1614-1620. 4. Ralha LV et al. Revista Brasileira de Medicina 2008; 65(11):378-387. 5. Bertin P et al. J Int Med Res 2003; 31(2):102-112. 6. Cheung R et al. Clin Ther 2007; 29:2498-2510.

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Qld expanded scope pilot now permanent

PHARMACIST-PRESCRIBING for a range of acute conditions will become a permanent feature of Queensland’s health system, the Queensland Minister for Health, Tim Nicholls, announced at APP2025 on Fri.

The Queensland Community Pharmacy Pilot enables pharmacists who undertake specialised training to prescribe for a range of acute conditions, making timely care more accessible to Queenslanders when and where they need it.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) Queensland President Shane MacDonald welcomed the announcement, saying the success of the trial over the last 12 months has demonstrated the critical role pharmacists play in improving patient access to care.

“Queenslanders have embraced the ability to see their local pharmacist for a consultation of their presenting complaint, reducing pressure on emergency departments and our health system,” MacDonald said.

“This announcement is a testament to the quality of care pharmacists deliver.

“Making this program permanent is a win for patients, ensuring they continue to have timely access to safe, effective treatment close to home,” he said.

The program falls short of making all 23 conditions in the Community Pharmacy Pilot permanent, with chronic conditions such as cardiovascular diseases still being piloted.

PSA National President Associate Professor Fei Sim reaffirmed the PSA’s commitment to supporting practitioners undertaking specialised training to become full scope prescribing pharmacists with

a range of professional support.

“As the peak body for all pharmacists, we’re calling on pharmacists across the state to enrol in the training program and take the next steps toward full scope,” Assoc Prof Sim said.

“We’re supporting our pharmacist workforce to be prepared for full scope of practice to become permanent with training and education opportunities announced earlier this week, as well as practice support for pharmacists across the state,” she continued.

“Pharmacists who want to take advantage of this opportunity should enrol as soon as possible to ensure they don’t miss out, as opportunities for training subsidies are limited.”

However, the announcement was not universally welcomed, with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), warning the Queensland Government against “prioritising retail politics and pharmacy owners over patient health and safety”.

The RACGP pointed out that pharmacists are not trained to diagnose medical conditions, and this raises the risk of misdiagnosis, inappropriate treatment, delays to healthcare, and a less efficient and well-connected health system.

RACGP Rural Chair, Associate Professor Michael Clements, said the move will not increase access to healthcare, and called on the Government to improve access to medical care and prioritise patient safety.

“As a North Queensland GP, I’ve been at the heart of the pharmacy prescribing trial, and the myth of its



value as a solution to rural health access,” he said.

“This is not a criticism of pharmacists, who are our colleagues - as GPs, we can’t overstate the value pharmacists, both those based in general practices and our local pharmacies, provide for us and our patients.

“The problem is one of a powerful industry lobby seeking to expand pharmacy owners’ revenue streams, and offering what seems like a straightforward solution.

“That this was announced at the largest pharmacy trade exhibition in the southern hemisphere speaks for itself.”

Dr Clements said that a quick inspection by a pharmacist without medical training might lead to appropriate treatment where odds are in their favour, but added that the Government should not be gambling with people’s health.

“GPs and other doctors are trained to diagnose conditions, and we spend at least a decade training to do so,” he explained.

“You can’t learn diagnosis in an online course - it’s a process of elimination, and this is the opposite approach,” he continued, warning that “by expanding pharmacy prescribing, the Qld Government is making more misdiagnosis statistically inevitable.” KB

180 yrs of Symbion

SYMBION will this year celebrate 180 years “supporting the essential healthcare needs of Australians and fostering a strong and vibrant pharmacy industry”.

Symbion CEO Brett Barons told APP2025 delegates on Fri that the company’s longevity “was a testament to its strong commitment to pharmacy customers so they can focus on caring for their patients”.



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Dispensary Corner

A MAN in Lebanon suffering from hiccups for two years has recently found out that a well-known but rare type of allergy was the cause of his strange medical condition.

Published in the *Journal of Medical Case Reports*, doctors revealed that the man had been experiencing hiccups on and off for more than two years, which he attempted to treat with a variety of medications, including a muscle relaxant, an antipsychotic and proton-pump inhibitors.

It got to the point that the man had nonstop hiccups for two weeks straight, leading him to be hospitalised.

Blood tests revealed he had an unusually high level of eosinophils, white blood cells that help fend off parasitic infections, which also often play a role in causing allergy and asthma symptoms.

Further tests revealed he also had a condition called eosinophilic oesophagitis, a damaging build-up of eosinophils in the oesophagus.

Sufferers often have a delayed reaction to their allergic triggers. More common symptoms include heartburn, getting food stuck in the oesophagus and having trouble swallowing - none of which the man had.

The doctors found only two other recorded cases of chronic hiccups caused by eosinophilic oesophagitis.

After being given a topical steroid, the man's hiccups ended after a week and his eosinophil count returned to healthy levels.

WC beats BMI for cancer risk

WAIST circumference is a stronger risk marker than BMI for obesity-related cancer in men, a study of almost 340,000 people has found.

However, that was not the case for women, where the association was weaker.

During a median follow-up of 14 years, around 18,000 obesity-related cancers were recorded.

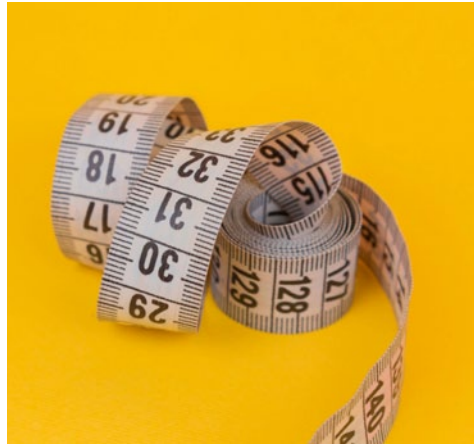
Cancers linked with obesity include cancers of the oesophagus (adenocarcinoma), gastric (cardia), colon, rectum, liver/intrahepatic bile ducts, gallbladder, pancreas, breast (postmenopausal), endometrium, ovary, renal cell carcinoma, meningioma, thyroid, and multiple myeloma.

As well as finding that waist circumference (WC) is a more reliable indicator of risk than BMI, the researchers found that after accounting for BMI, high WC remains a risk factor for obesity-related cancer in men.

This suggests that the elevated risk associated with abdominal adiposity is specific, and not explained by high body size alone, as measured by BMI.

The authors, who presented the researcher at the recent European Congress on Obesity, explained that while BMI is a measure of body size, it does not provide information on fat distribution, "whereas waist circumference is a proxy more closely related to abdominal adiposity".

"This distinction is crucial because visceral fat, which accumulates around the abdominal organs, is more metabolically active and has been implicated in adverse



health outcomes, including insulin resistance, inflammation, and abnormal blood fat levels.

"Consequently, individuals with similar BMIs may have distinct cancer risks due to differences in fat distribution."

As to why it was different for men versus women, they suggested: "A plausible explanation is that men are more likely to store fat viscerally, while women generally accumulate more subcutaneous and peripheral fat.

"Consequently, WC is a more accurate measure of visceral fat in men than in women.

"This may make waist circumference a stronger risk factor of cancer in men, and explain why waist circumference adds risk information beyond that conveyed by BMI in men, but not women."

The researchers noted that including hip circumference into risk models may provide further insights into this sex difference and enhance the association between WC and cancer - particularly for women, where the combination of waist circumference and hip circumference give a better estimation of visceral fat than waist circumference alone. *KB*

TWC loyalty program recognised

TERRYWHITE Chemmart has been awarded Best Loyalty Program Marketing Campaign at the Asia Pacific Loyalty Awards, hosted by the Australian Loyalty Association.

TWC noted that the award recognises the success of the refreshed Rewards Plus program, which is designed to "help pharmacies build stronger connections with their customers through trust, care and great service".

Nick Munroe, TWC Executive General Manager, said: "This achievement reflects the hard work and focus of our marketing and support teams.

"Our campaigns are all about helping TerryWhite Chemmart Network Partners attract and retain loyal customers, by delivering value and strengthening relationships."

The Rewards Plus campaign has played a key role in highlighting the benefits of the program and encouraging customers to take proactive steps with their health.

TWC pointed out that by linking loyalty to meaningful care, "the program supports pharmacies in rewarding customers not only for their purchases but for making positive health choices."

Pictured: Siobhan Taylor, CRM Lifecycle Manager and Stefani Pandovski, Loyalty Marketing Manager.





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