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Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news.

World Asthma Day campaign

THE Pharmacy Guild of Australia Queensland branch marked World Asthma Day yesterday with a community campaign reminding residents that pharmacies are offering more asthma management services in more locations, improving access to care.

Services include supporting asthma action plans and ongoing management, reviewing medications to ensure they are being used effectively, providing education on symptom management and triggers and supporting correct inhaler technique.

Experts forecast 2026 flu season

OFF the back of Australia's deadliest flu season this century (PD 26 Feb), a group of experts have foreshadowed what lies ahead for the 2026 winter flu season.

While case levels have been tracking lower this year than last, 2025 was impacted by a longer than usual flu season, fuelled by the emergence of a dominant sub-type, so-called Super-K (PD 10 Mar), said Professor Patrick Reading, director of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Reference and Research on Influenza at the Doherty Institute.

He noted that this year's vaccine included changes to both H1N1 and H3N2 components, and while early global data showed moderate vaccine effectiveness, even against emerging variants, the 2026 formulation was now "a better match for the circulating viruses that we're expecting this winter".

However, he warned that what to come is not yet clear.

"We cannot predict the severity, or which virus or viruses will predominate in the upcoming influenza season," Professor Reading said.

"We kind of have to wait and watch," he added.

Professor Kristine Macartney from the University of Sydney emphasised that the record number of cases last year were likely only the tip of the iceberg, saying "there are many people who didn't go to the doctor, didn't get a test, didn't get notified".

Professor Macartney flagged the intranasal flu vaccine now being offered to children as a potential gamechanger for Australia, following its success in the US, Canada and the UK.

"In fact, it is the backbone of a very comprehensive all-child



influenza program in the UK," she said.

"It's just that it took a long time to get a Southern Hemisphere formulation manufactured." KB

Subsidised CAR T-cell therapy for multiple myeloma available

ELIGIBLE Australians with multiple myeloma will now have no-cost access to a new CAR T-cell therapy, Carvykti (ciltacabtagene autoleucel, Johnson & Johnson), in public hospitals across the country.

The initiative was announced yesterday by Health Minister Mark Butler, who noted the treatment cost for each patient would exceed \$200,000 per year without government funding.

Multiple myeloma is a treatable, but not curable, type of blood cancer affecting more than 14,000 Australians.

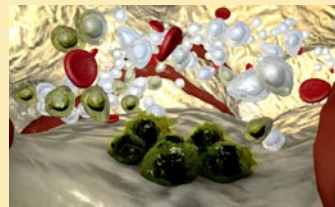
Carvykti is an innovative therapy for adults whose multiple myeloma has relapsed or is not responding to other treatments, and is now available at the Alfred

Hospital and Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Melbourne.

Jointly funded by the Federal and state governments, it will soon be rolled out in other specialist public hospitals in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia, with cross-border arrangements for interstate patients.

"The availability of this new treatment approach in Australia for patients who have exhausted other available treatment options is very exciting news and could not have come soon enough," said haematology professor Andrew Spencer from the Alfred in Melbourne.

Professor Spencer was involved in clinical trials of Carvykti and will be one of the first specialists



in Australia to administer the government-funded therapy.

"We are entering a new treatment era in multiple myeloma," he continued.

"With this cell therapy, the management of relapsed or refractory myeloma has become personalised, immune-based and highly effective.

"This new treatment offers survival benefits never-before-seen in heavily treated patients," he concluded.

NOT JUST FLU. THERE'S WHOOPING COUGH TOO

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1. Australian Government. Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. Australian Immunisation Handbook. Available at <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au>. Accessed March 2026. sanofi-aventis australia pty ltd trading as Sanofi. All rights reserved. ABN 31 008 558 807. Sydney, Australia. www.sanofi.com.au. MAT-AU-2600393 V1. Date of preparation: March 2026.

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Act on nicotine pouches now: AMA

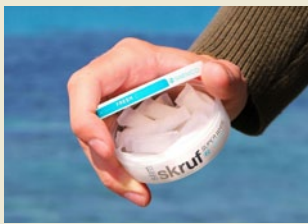
THE Australian Medical Association (AMA) is calling for increased regulation of nicotine pouches, warning the products are being promoted and sold in ways that risk repeating the public health harms seen with vaping.

In a submission to the Therapeutic Goods Administration's targeted consultation on the regulation of nicotine pouches, the AMA has urged the Federal Government and enforcement agencies to move quickly to close loopholes that are allowing unapproved nicotine products to enter the market.

AMA vice president Associate Professor Julian Rait said reported harms from nicotine pouches included mouth and gum irritation, upset stomachs, nausea and high blood pressure.

"These pouches are being marketed with youth-attractive branding and sold online with minimal friction, despite having no approved therapeutic indication in Australia," Dr Rait said.

"Regulators must not wait until the use of nicotine pouches becomes entrenched in Australia," he concluded.



Forbes pharmacy tackling loneliness

A PHARMACY in the central west of NSW is helping address loneliness and social isolation in the community, with monthly gatherings to help residents connect through meaningful activities and support.

Flannery's Pharmacy in Forbes hosts community events, such as morning teas, as part of the Pharmacies Addressing Loneliness and Social Isolation (PALS) initiative, providing social connections and helping residents feel valued.

Founded by community pharmacist Jenny Kirschner, PALS has been mobilising the pharmacy industry to recognise loneliness as a serious public health issue since 2021, and delivers training for pharmacists to identify and address loneliness and social isolation.

"Unfortunately, [loneliness] rates can be higher in rural areas, and significant loneliness is linked to increased mental illness and physical health issues - so, this really is an issue we take very seriously," said Sarah Hazell (pictured left), pharmacist and partner at Flannery's Pharmacy.

"As pharmacists, we see patients more often than many other health professionals, and we have regular and direct contact with patients, which gives us the opportunity to assess and support accordingly."

Hazell told *Pharmacy Daily* that Flannery's Pharmacy has long been a hub for community connection, having hosted many morning teas over the years.

"We had the necessary equipment already on hand, and the team chose to keep things



simple, starting small and building gradually," she explained.

The team spreads the word about upcoming events through in-store flyers, patient accounts, social media, and conversations with customers visiting the pharmacy.

On PALS morning tea days, extra team members are rostered to spend time with attendees, introduce people to one another, offer a listening ear, and spark conversations around loneliness and connection.

"Community pharmacies like Flannery's are uniquely positioned to support social wellbeing," Hazell told *PD*.

"With our knowledge of local resources such as sporting clubs, men's sheds, craft/sewing days, local events, and support groups, we can guide patients toward meaningful ways to connect and feel part of their community."

Hazell said the feedback from patients has been positive.

"They have told us they very much enjoyed the morning tea and have it in their calendar to attend the next one," she said.

"We hope each morning tea gets bigger, and we make a difference to those who may be experiencing loneliness in our community." *KB*

New COPD med

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has registered Nucala (mepolizumab, GSK) for use as an add-on maintenance treatment for adult patients with uncontrolled chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), with raised blood eosinophils on stable inhaled triple therapy.

This announcement follows Nucala's positive recommendation for PBS listing at the March 2026 Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee meeting.

Uncontrolled COPD is associated with a significant burden of disease, and is a leading cause of potentially preventable hospital admissions in Australia and the fifth highest cause of death.

"Despite existing treatments, including triple inhaled therapy, there remains a critical need for new treatment options that address the underlying drivers of inflammation across a broad spectrum of COPD patients, including those with chronic bronchitis and emphysema, to reduce the frequency and severity of exacerbations," said respiratory physician Dr Sanjay Ramakrishnan.

As the first monoclonal antibody listed on the ARTG for COPD that targets interleukin-5, a key driver of type 2 inflammation, Nucala represents a new biologic option for eligible people with the condition.



LEADING THE WAY

Wesfarmers Health Chief Customer Officer **Richard Pearson** on what's in store for the business in 2026.

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Dispensary Corner

WE HAVE all heard the countless tips and tricks to help induce sleep, but did you know that you can fool yourself into falling asleep simply by using reverse psychology?

At least, that is the opinion of sleep expert Dr Deborah Lee, who said telling yourself to stay awake could help me you drift off more quickly.

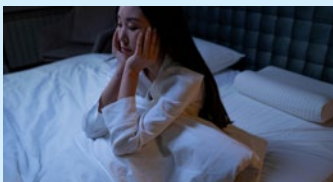
"When sleep starts to feel like a battle, sometimes the smartest move is to stop fighting it altogether," she said.

"Just keep repeating the phrase in your head, 'do not fall asleep', and eventually, your eye muscles will tire out and you'll be asleep before you know it."

Experts believe this works because it breaks the cycle where the harder you try to fall asleep, the more frustrated and alert you become.

Dr Lee also offered another unusual suggestion to further relaxation - the '4-7-8' breathing technique, which involves pressing the tip of your tongue against your upper front teeth and breathing in through your nose for a count of four, holding your breath for seven, then exhaling through your mouth for eight.

"You might find that a weird noise comes out of your mouth, but this is all part of the process - keep repeating until you fall asleep," she explained.



PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

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