

## Submission to Victorian Department of Health consultation paper on the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Act via online survey

### Treatment, care and support

**Question 11. Do you think the proposals meet the Royal Commission's recommendations about reducing the use and negative impacts of seclusion and restraint, and regulation of chemical restraint?** (Section 4.2 in the paper)

Yes

**Question 12: How do you think the proposals about seclusion and restraint could be improved?** (Section 4.2 in the paper)

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is the national professional organisation for more than 5,000 pharmacists, pharmacists in training, pharmacy technicians and associates working across Australia's health system. SHPA has over 1,700 pharmacists engaged in its Mental Health and Geriatric Medicine Specialty Practice pharmacy streams, supporting older Australians in hospitals and aged care settings nationally. SHPA members are progressive advocates for clinical excellence, committed to evidence-based practice and passionate about patient care.

SHPA supports the regulation of chemical restraint in the new *Mental Health and Wellbeing Act*, and the inclusion of a definition for chemical restraint that is based on the clinician's intent in prescribing the medication and aimed to restrict its use to last resort only. However, as identified in the *Mental Health and Wellbeing Act: update and engagement paper*, determining the intent of a clinician in prescribing a medication, particularly those that have strong sedative effects, can be challenging.

The implementation of Psychotropic Stewardship programs involving Mental Health Pharmacists and Geriatric Medicine Pharmacists in all hospitals and aged care settings, is a successful way to ensure appropriate use of psychotropic medications and to work towards eliminating chemical restraint practices in Victoria. Clinical pharmacists with specific mental health or geriatric medicine knowledge and expertise known as Mental Health Pharmacists or Geriatric Medicine Pharmacists, are uniquely positioned to determine whether antipsychotic medication prescribing is appropriate and in accordance with clinical practice guidelines, and thus, are able to determine if they are being used therapeutically or for chemical restraint.<sup>1</sup>

Psychotropic medications affect the mind, emotions and behaviour of an individual, and are recognised as high-risk medicines by the Australian Commission for Safety and Quality in Health Care.<sup>2</sup> They are often used to treat behavioural and psychological symptoms in people living with dementia and in the management of delirium. There is however, a high prevalence of inappropriate use of psychotropic medications in older people. The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety's Final Report: Care, Dignity and Respect<sup>3</sup>, identified an over-reliance on chemical restraint in the purported 'care' of older people in aged care.

Psychotropic Stewardship programs are an effective strategy for supporting Victorians at risk of harms associated with the inappropriate use of antipsychotics. Psychotropic Stewardship programs involve specialised clinical pharmacists, and incorporate coordinated interventions to improve, monitor and evaluate the use of antipsychotics in patients, as suggested in the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Act. These highly experienced pharmacists support clinicians in the identification of appropriate pharmacological management options to treat patients with recognised behaviours of concern (BOC), aggression and/or a need for acute sedation. There is also an opportunity to involve these pharmacists in BOC calls and/or Code Grey teams in Victorian hospital settings.

Specialised clinical pharmacists embedded in hospital and aged care Psychotropic Stewardship programs also have a significant governance role. They develop psychotropic medication management policies and guidelines<sup>4</sup> and play a vital part in minimising chemical restraint through regular audits and quality improvement activities as part of their Quality Use of Medicines (QUM) role at a facility level. Fundamentally, Mental Health Pharmacists and Geriatric Medicine Pharmacists are well placed to support the Victorian Government and the Chief officer for Mental Health towards eliminating the use of chemical restraint in Victoria.

### **Your organisation's details**

**Organisation's Name:** The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia

**Organisation Website:** <https://www.shpa.org.au/>

**Please select all categories that best describe your organisation:** Sector peak body

---

<sup>1</sup> The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia. Geriatric Medicine and Aged Care Clinical Pharmacy Services. Melbourne: SHPA; 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. Medication without harm – WHO Global Patient Safety Challenge. Australia's response. Sydney: ACSQHC; 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety 2021. Final Report: Care, Dignity and Respect. Volume 1 Summary and recommendations. Australian Government 2021

<sup>4</sup> Pellicano O A, Tong E, Yip G, Monk L, Loh X, Ananda-Rajah M, Dooley M. Geriatric Psychotropic Stewardship Team to de-escalate inappropriate psychotropic medications in general medicine inpatients: An evaluation. *Australas J Ageing* 2018; 37(2): E37–E41.

