

Media release

Thursday 31 March 2022

Labor's aged care reform welcomed, but Geriatric Medicine Pharmacists needed alongside nurses

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) has welcomed Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Anthony Albanese MP's five-point plan to fix the aged care crisis in their Opposition Budget Reply speech tonight, while supporting workforce investment through expanded university and TAFE places.

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says the foremost measure under Labor's aged care plan – requiring every aged care facility to have a registered, qualified nurse on site, 24 hours a day, seven days a week – is a key step toward reducing preventable harm from medicines.

'Having a registered nurse on-site at all times in aged care facilities is important, given the many medication-related issues that cannot be addressed or resolved without nursing staff on-site, however the crucial role of pharmacy in aged care is undeniable.

'Australian research indicates 91% of aged care residents take at least five regular medicines, and 65% take more than 10 every day, and we also know antipsychotics are inappropriately used in aged care, which pharmacists can detect and prevent.

'To complement and maximise the value of this investment, commensurate funding and support for embedding Geriatric Medicine Pharmacists into residential aged care facilities is required, to reduce the incidence of medication-related hospital admissions.'

Ms Michaels says this week's commitment by the Federal Government toward embedding pharmacy expertise in residential aged care facilities must be matched and extended in the interests of medicines safety.

'SHPA is pleased our early call for investment in clinical pharmacy services for aged care residents – including 1:200 pharmacist to resident ratios – has been embraced this week by the current government, an important step toward reduce medicines misuse and preventable harm among this vulnerable cohort.

'Should we see a change of government this year this momentum must not be lost, and we will continue to push strongly for broader access to the unique expertise of Hospital Pharmacists, to identify and manage medication-related issues as early as possible and prevent admissions to hospitals.'

Labor's Budget Reply also announced additional university places, 465,000 fee-free TAFE places, and the creation of Jobs and Skills Australia should they form government.

Ms Michaels says shortages in the Hospital Pharmacy workforce are being felt throughout Australian public and private hospitals, in metropolitan and regional areas.

'While demand for Hospital Pharmacists are higher than ever due to the COVID-19 pandemic, university enrolments in pharmacy have been stagnating at best.

‘Additional university places for pharmacy students, along with additional TAFE places for pharmacy technicians, are crucial to ensuring we have a sustainable Hospital Pharmacy workforce pipeline to meet the immediate and long-term future healthcare needs of Australians.’

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About SHPA

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is the national, professional organisation for the 6,300+ Hospital Pharmacists, and their Hospital Pharmacist Intern and Hospital Pharmacy Technician colleagues working across Australia’s health system, advocating for their pivotal role improving the safety and quality of medicines use. Embedded in multidisciplinary medical teams and equipped with exceptional medicines management expertise, SHPA members are progressive advocates for clinical excellence, committed to evidence-based practice and passionate about patient care.

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