

Media release

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SHPA welcomes medicines safety progress as PBAC backs opioid restrictions

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) has welcomed a raft of recommendations from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) to restrict the prescribing of opioids, including smaller pack sizes, as part of broader efforts to support appropriate use and reduce associated harms.

The recommendations include new Restricted Benefit listings for smaller maximum quantities of immediate-release opioids listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) as a means of reducing the number of patients prescribed a greater quantity than required; the measure reflects recommendations 18 and 19 in SHPA's landmark [Reducing Opioid-related Harm report \(2018\)](#).

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says the policy move is necessary and timely, as stakeholders anticipate review of the National Medicines Policy, and work toward goals associated with Medicines Safety and Quality Use of Medicines as Australia's newest National Health Priority Area.

'Amid many data points, our 2018 report found more than 70% of hospitals frequently supplied opioids for patients to take home "just in case", even when they had not required them in the 48 hours prior to discharge, which has the potential to lead to preventable harm.

'These new changes, recommended following advice from the TGA's Opioid Regulatory Advisory Group (ORAG) of which SHPA is a member, are key to reducing the prescribing and dispensing of opioids in quantities that are in excess of patient need.

'SHPA members, including medicines experts on our Pain Management Leadership Committee, look forward to collaborating with government and healthcare partners on education and awareness campaigns, changes to clinical guidelines and ongoing prescription and compliance monitoring.'

In the announcement, PBAC noted the TGA had revised the indications of several opioid analgesics to broadly categorise them into opioids for acute and chronic severe pain, and that the TGA would be requiring sponsors to register new smaller pack sizes for some immediate-release opioid analgesics, a measure [first announced at SHPA's 2019 Medicines Leadership Forum](#).

Ms Michaels heralded the announcement as a win for grassroots member advocacy that is cognizant of the ongoing pain management needs of Australians.

'Our members care for many of the mostly acutely unwell Australians, including providing clinical pharmacy services after surgery, and SHPA is committed to the safe and clinically appropriate use of opioids.

'While we recognise the important role opioids play in providing pain relief for many people, the documented high number of deaths and hospitalisations caused by prescription opioids in Australia is unethical and untenable and we thank our members who contributed [crucially relevant frontline data](#) that helped inform these PBAC recommendations.'

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About SHPA

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is the national, professional, for-purpose organisation for leading pharmacists and pharmacy technicians 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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