



4 August 2020

Ms Annemieke Jongsma  
Committee Secretary  
Select Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic response  
Legislative Assembly for the ACT  
GPO Box 1020  
Canberra ACT 2601  
[LACommitteeCOVID19@parliament.act.gov.au](mailto:LACommitteeCOVID19@parliament.act.gov.au)

Dear Ms Jongsma,

**RE: Select Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic Response (ACT)**

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia 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 is committed to facilitating the safe and effective use of medicines, which is the core business of pharmacists, especially in hospitals.

SHPA welcomes the opportunity to respond to Select Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic Response. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Australian healthcare system has been substantial, and SHPA along with its members are proud to have played a significant role.

SHPA would like to thank the ACT Government for their effective leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. The existing regulation under the *Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Regulation 2008* permitting supply of medicines from digital image prescriptions and emergency supply of medicines, are important to support continuous supply of critical medicines for chronic conditions, whilst reducing the risk of community transmission posed by hospital outpatients having to attend hospitals in person.

However, given the ACT is not a signatory to bilateral Pharmaceutical Reform Agreements, hospital pharmacies were unable to supply one month's quantity worth of discharge medicines to patients discharging from hospital subsidised by the Federal Government. Instead, usually only 3-7 days' worth of discharge medicines are supplied to discharging patients. Thus, the onus on patients to attend make and attend an appointment with their general practitioner within a week of discharge during a global pandemic, presented a great risk to people in the ACT in continuing to take their medicines that will reduce readmission risk, as well as risk community transmission by having to attend a primary care appointment soon after discharge.

Please see attached SHPA's submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which discuss the challenges faced by Australian hospitals throughout the COVID-19 pandemic including; medicines supply and access, hospital preparedness and workforce capacity. These findings were supported by SHPA's Hospital Pharmacy Capacity Snapshot survey series which lasted for five weeks between April – May 2020.

The single largest concern experienced by Directors of Pharmacy, Chief Pharmacists and SHPA members nationally was the immense difficulty experienced by hospital pharmacy departments to procure critical medicines for the anticipated surge of patients requiring ventilation in intensive care units. Whilst governments placed a high priority on obtaining personal protective equipment and ventilators, the difficulties that would be



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faced by Australia's hospitals in obtaining the medicines necessary to use ventilators does not appear to have been appreciated. These medicines include, but are not limited to:

- propofol – induction agent for intubation, sedative agent for ventilation
- cisatracurium, atracurium, rocuronium, vecuronium, pancuronium – neuromuscular blockers to facilitate intubation and ventilation
- midazolam, fentanyl – induction agents for intubation, sedative agents for ventilation

In the initial weeks of our survey, participating Australian hospital pharmacies reported 80% of orders for propofol were either being placed on backorder or only supplied in part quantities. The survey also found that in four out of the five weeks surveyed, the majority of orders for neuromuscular blockers were placed on backorder, with less than 30% of these orders being supplied in full. Overall, regional and rural hospitals – with fewer options and less workforce capacity to manage procurement – experienced a greater rate of orders being placed on backorder. This had the potential to risk patient care, although SHPA does not claim that this has occurred in ACT.

Looking forward, SHPA provides this information for the consideration of the government in any future planning for public health emergencies. If you have any queries or would like to discuss our submission further, please do not hesitate to contact Johanna de Wever, General Manager, Advocacy and Leadership on [jdeweaver@shpa.org.au](mailto:jdeweaver@shpa.org.au).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'K. Michaels'.

Kristin Michaels  
Chief Executive

### **Attachments**

SHPA Submission to Senate Inquiry into the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic



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