



4 August 2020

Ms Leslie Guy  
Secretary to the Committee  
COVID-19 Response Committee  
Parliament House  
North Terrace  
Adelaide SA 5000

Dear Ms Guy,

**RE: Submission to the COVID-19 Response Committee (SA)**

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 COVID-19 Response Committee regarding the management of the COVID-19 pandemic response in South Australia. 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 recognise and thank the South Australian Government for their effective leadership during the COVID19 pandemic. In particular, changes made by the South Australian Department of Health and Wellbeing to regulations regarding:

- electronic transmission of digital image prescriptions (*Electronic Transmission of Digital Image of Prescription; Regulation 33(5) Controlled Substances (Poisons) Regulations 2011*) and
- emergency supply of medicines (*Controlled Substances (Poisons) (Emergency Supply – Human Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)) Notice 2020*)

enabled pharmacists to enable 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. SHPA commends the implementation of such measures to complement legislative and regulatory changes made nationally regarding telehealth consultations and prescriptions to ensure safe medicines access and medicines adherence for South Australians.

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, difficulties were experienced



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by Australia's hospitals in obtaining the medicines necessary to use ventilators. 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 – who had less experience and capacity to treat intensive care patients – experienced a greater rate of orders being placed on backorder.

SHPA notes that South Australia has a centralised hospital services including centralised hospital pharmacy functions, allowing the South Australian government oversight of purchasing, warehousing, and distribution of medicines to public hospitals. This oversight is extremely helpful in directing the timely coordination of key medicine stocks to hospital sites that are in need in the event of a localised surge of COVID-19 cases. SHPA does not claim that the snapshot results reflect the situation in South Australia, only that they represent the experiences of many hospitals across Australia and therefore may be of interest.

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 [jdewever@shpa.org.au](mailto:jdewever@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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