

Media release

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Skills shortage report strengthens SHPA call for pharmacy workforce plan

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) has reiterated its call for the commissioning of a [ten-year National Pharmacy Workforce Plan](#) to support pharmacy workforce sustainability, after the nationwide shortages of Hospital Pharmacists and Retail Pharmacists were formally acknowledged yesterday by the National Skills Commission (NSC).

The NSC's [2022 Skills Priority List](#) found shortages in all states and territories across both pharmacist occupation categories, sharpening focus on the urgent need for a national strategy to meet the immediate and future healthcare needs of the Australian community.

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says Australia is at an inflection point, following three years in which the pitfalls and potential of healthcare funding were debated like never before.

'We must not lose the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which it was plain to see that beds, ventilators and vials are meaningless if we do not have enough specialist, experienced healthcare workers behind them.

'Despite the hospital pharmacy workforce growing by ~50% nationally in the last decade, our sector is still recognised as in shortage as demand for Hospital Pharmacists' expertise has far outstripped growth.

'Our medical colleagues and allied health colleagues know how important Hospital Pharmacists are to improving medication safety, facilitating patient flow through our crowded Emergency Departments and inpatient wards, and improving our healthcare systems capacity.

'Beyond the provision of medicines, the "four walls" that surround hospital pharmacy are changing, and the specialised skills of Hospital Pharmacists are leading a growing number of interdisciplinary stewardship services to better meet the needs of some of Australia's most vulnerable patients.

'In addition to their invaluable clinical skills, specialist Hospital Pharmacists have been proven to reduce medication-related harms, optimise medication use, decrease hospital length of stay and reduce readmissions and their associated Medicare costs.'

Ms Michaels says while SHPA welcomed [hospitals and health funding announced in the 2022-23 Federal Budget](#), a fit-for-purpose future workforce is needed to implement and ensure impact, and the upcoming October 2022 Budget under the new Labor government – which counts a hospital pharmacist amongst its ranks in the Hon. Emma McBride MP – is an opportunity to support the pharmacy workforce's sustainability.

'We have seen alarming rates of Hospital Pharmacists leave the hospital sector and job vacancies have never been higher. In response to longstanding concerns and requests from pharmacists, SHPA has

developed Foundation Residencies and Advanced Training Residencies in an Australian-first, to support pharmacists through their career development, and ensure they remain within the healthcare system.

‘In the first five years, and without any direct federal government support, SHPA’s Residency programs have supported just under 700 pharmacists nationwide; Residencies must be expanded further and offered to all newly registered pharmacists.’

Ms Michaels says national strategy must anticipate and fund the training and development of specialist pharmacists, and plan the Hospital Pharmacy roles Australia needs, to safely and fully realise the benefit of investments made today.

‘SHPA is looking forward to the on-site aged care pharmacist program, beginning in 2023, and is ready to support professional development and education for this exciting new cohort of pharmacists – but it must also be acknowledged these aged care pharmacists will be coming from pharmacy sectors that are recognised as in shortage.

‘First and foremost, our health care workers are people. People who have gone above and beyond to protect our communities during Australia’s most challenging public health crisis in a century.

‘To bolster their ranks in upholding public safety, support resilience and reduce burnout, and safeguard against future crises, we need to start planning now.’

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About SHPA

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is the national, professional organisation for the 6,100+ 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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