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Health sector unites to turn the tide on medicine safety

Better use of existing funding, leveraging digital health, empowering consumers and the workforce are among the keys to thinking and acting differently on medicine safety.

These were the themes resonating at a forum of stakeholders representing the breadth of health care, including government and consumers, held in Canberra today.

Convened by the Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF), Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA), the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA), NPS MedicineWise and academic partners Monash University and University of Sydney, participants were challenged to 'think differently' on the safe use of medicines in Australia to turn the tide on this major health challenge.

"Medicine safety is a priority for us all and we each have a role to play," PSA National President Associate Professor Chris Freeman said. "It was inspiring to see the sector work together today to proactively identify those measures we can cooperatively pursue to make a real difference and protect patients."

"Improving medicine safety is not just about spending more money but also about being more strategic with the money that is spent."

Medicine safety and quality use of medicines was recently declared the 10th National Health Priority Area by Commonwealth and state and territory health ministers.

CHF CEO, Leanne Wells, said: "Discussions often returned to how vital it is to have patients actively engaged in their health care decisions and informed about the medicines they are prescribed.

"Modern medication offers great benefits but the rate of hospital admissions caused by avoidable medication errors shows the importance of ensuring consumers are informed about their medicines, which is an integral part of broader quality use of medicines.

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels said: "The Medicine Safety Forum represents collaborative medicine leadership, which is crucial to ensuring Australians gain the greatest possible benefit from medicine use.

"The successful combination of effective medicine, provided in an accessible manner, with appropriate counselling and care from an expert workforce, will deliver the positive patient outcomes we all seek."

NPS MedicineWise CEO Steve Morris said: “We need to cherish the ethos of quality use of medicines. While Australia’s National Strategy for the Quality Use of Medicines requires an update, the principles of 20 years ago, including the primacy of consumers, is just as relevant today.”

The cost of medicine-related harm is significant, estimated at more than \$1.4 billion each year.

“Today there was deep discussion of the actions we can take to reduce harm from medicines. We will now take the feedback and ideas we received from participants and develop a suite of recommendations and work with relevant stakeholders to implement as a matter of urgency,” Associate Professor Freeman said.

“We’d like to thank the more than hundred experts who joined us today and thought outside the box to address one of Australia’s greatest healthcare challenges.

“The depth and number of participants at today’s Forum shows how important this issue is and how committed the health care sector is to improving medicine safety.”

A report on the outcomes of the Medicine Safety Forum, including recommendations will now be developed.

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