

Media release

Tuesday 10 September 2019

Dangerous health care divide highlights need to support medicines care

ABC TV's flagship current affairs program has highlighted the stark inequity in access to high-quality hospital care across Australia, through alarming evidence of poor hospital care for many Australians, particularly in rural and remote areas.

Broadcast last night, the ['Health Hazard' episode of Four Corners](#) brought to life recent data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) showing for every 100,000 people, there are 91.6 avoidable deaths in major cities, compared with 248.7 avoidable deaths in very remote parts of the country.

Ms Kristin Michaels, Chief Executive of the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA), says hospital pharmacists, alongside medical and nursing colleagues, would welcome the national attention on geographical discrepancies in the standard of care provided to Australians.

'It's extremely important we hear what clinicians are telling us.

'Our system is struggling to meet patient needs, and when cracks emerge, patients suffer. Regional services are the canary in the coal mine.'

Ms Michaels says SHPA has been vocal about the impact of a \$44 million hospital pharmacy funding reduction in the 2019-20 Federal Budget and its threat to public and private hospital pharmacy departments' capability to provide necessary pharmacy services.

'Health professionals in regional and rural areas are understandably very worried about the impact of this cut; hospital pharmacies are already often under-staffed and reduced funding will only further exacerbate workload pressures, meaning more patients will receive less medicines support.

'As well as the threat to patient care, this is also surprising financially: every \$1 invested in pharmacist care saves hospitals up to \$23 by optimising medicines prescribing and reducing length of stay, laboratory monitoring and risk of readmission.'

'Inappropriate medicines use is implicated in 250,000 hospitalisations and 400,000 emergency department presentations annually; pharmacists are perfectly positioned and expertly trained to help reduce these figures through playing key roles in multidisciplinary care teams.'

Ms Michaels says the urgent need to improve medicine management for all Australians is driving SHPA to call for changes to funding for hospital pharmacy services nationally.

'SHPA's 2019 Medicines Leadership Forum identified the need for the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority introduce a funding adjustment factor for patients at high-risk of medicine misadventure, to ensure they receive the pharmacy care necessary to reduce the likelihood of preventable complications, errors and poor outcomes.

'Without a systemic approach to national medicines workforce funding, patients in small hospitals, typically rural or remote, are less able to access the full suite of pharmacy services they need to ensure their medicine use is optimal.

'SHPA will continue to liaise with jurisdictional governments to ensure appropriate funding is directed to public hospitals to facilitate treatment with medicines that meets the community's expectations.'

'Health Hazard', reported by Louise Milligan, aired on ABC1 on Monday 9 September at 8.30pm, replayed on Tuesday 10 September at 1.00pm and Wednesday 11 September at 11.20pm. The episode can also be seen on ABC NEWS channel on Saturday 14 September at 8.10pm AEST, ABC iview and at abc.net.au/4corners.

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For more information contact:

Nick Sharp-Paul, Head of Strategy and Communication
nsharp-paul@shpa.org.au | 0411 098 838

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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