

Media release

Thursday 9 March 2023

Hospital Pharmacists call for workforce and medicines access equity ahead of NSW Election

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) has today released its [2023 New South Wales State Election Priorities](#), calling on major parties, minor parties and independent candidates to end longstanding inequities to medicines access and access to hospital pharmacist workforce in New South Wales public hospitals.

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says, 'New South Wales leads the nation in many ways but when it comes to medicines access and pharmacy services in public hospitals, it lags well behind.'

'SHPA's priorities are simple, clear and directly address two recommendations from last year's [New South Wales ambulance ramping inquiry](#), to which SHPA detailed the extent and impact of under-resourcing in New South Wales public hospital pharmacy departments.'

The central pillars of SHPA's 2023 New South Wales State Election Priorities are the \$268 million *Hospital Pharmacy Workforce Sustainability in NSW Public Hospitals* proposal, which will deliver an additional ~600 pharmacist positions each year, and action to establish a Pharmaceutical Reform Agreement with the Commonwealth.

Ms Michaels says evidence is mounting that the lack of hospital pharmacy support is contributing to preventable medicine-related harm.

'Current data shows New South Wales public hospitals have 38% more inpatient beds than Victoria, yet have 23% less hospital pharmacists. New South Wales hospital pharmacy departments cannot meet pharmacist-to-patient ratios described in professional standards, posing a significant risk of harmful medication error for patients.'

'In 2020, the [New South Wales Inquiry into rural and regional health](#) was called following a fatal medication error involving a high-risk anti-stroke medicine, which demonstrates how important pharmacists are to safeguarding patients from medication-related errors which can have devastating but preventable consequences.

'Without a sufficient workforce, New South Wales hospital pharmacy departments are missing out on innovations that improve safety and quality of care and support system capacity and bed flow, such as Partnered Pharmacist Medication Charting and Tech-Check-Tech inpatient medication supply models, which are entrenched in most other states and territories.'

Between 2001 and 2010, all states in Australia except New South Wales established a Pharmaceutical Reform Agreement with the Commonwealth, which enabled their public hospital patients a month's supply of subsidised medicines.

Ms Michaels says establishing a Pharmaceutical Reform Agreement with the Commonwealth is recommended by the ambulance ramping inquiry, and has been a longstanding call from New South Wales pharmacists and pharmacy technicians for over two decades.

'New South Wales patients discharging from public hospitals can receive as little as three days' supply of discharge medicines.

'This is nationally inconsistent, contributes to emergency departments being overwhelmed, and places immense pressure on patients to seek an immediate appointment with their GP post-discharge, facing a two to four week wait in many cases.'

Ms Michaels welcomed initiatives across the major parties, while noting new hospitals without commensurate healthcare workers presents a missed opportunity.

'We welcome the NSW Greens in supporting both of SHPA's 2023 New South Wales State Election Priorities, recognising the call for workforce investment aligns with their health policies, and NSW Labor's announcement for 2,000 health scholarships, extended to allied health workers.

'Should Labor form government, we look forward to supporting five-year bonded positions allocated to hospital pharmacists through internships, SHPA's Foundation Residencies and Advanced Training Residencies to bolster the future hospital pharmacy workforce.

'We also welcome the NSW Coalition's pledge of \$1.2 billion to build and upgrade 20 hospitals and health facilities, however we must have hospital pharmacists staffed at all of these health services at pharmacist-to-patient ratios recognised in professional standards, to ensure NSW communities have access to medicines expertise on acute hospital wards that is on par with their eastern seaboard neighbours.'

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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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