

Media release

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Another medicine safety milestone in member-driven opioid success story

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) has welcomed today's changes to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) to restrict the prescribing of opioids through smaller pack sizes, as part of broader efforts to support appropriate use and reduce associated harms.

The regulatory changes come 18 months after SHPA's landmark [Reducing Opioid-related Harm](#) report opened new conversations about services in hospitals, and forged new collaboration between healthcare practitioners and organisations to prevent unnecessary harm caused by opioids initiated in the hospital setting.

The changes include revised listings to include [halved pack sizes for a number of key medicines](#), including oxycodone, tramadol and morphine, with no increased quantities or repeats, for Australians requiring short-term relief of acute severe pain.

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels welcomed the changes, which aim to reduce the risk of opioid dependency or misuse for people self-managing pain after leaving hospital.

'On behalf of SHPA members and their hospital colleagues who care for Australia's most acutely unwell, we welcome these changes, which correlate to recommendations made in our 2018 report, which was informed by data from 135 metropolitan, regional and rural Australian hospitals.

'The Federal Government is to be commended for its support for smaller pack sizes for opioids, better labelling, warnings and consumer information for opioid medicines, and additional restrictions on the use and prescribing of opioids for longer term use, all of which help reduce the prescribing and dispensing of opioids in quantities that are in excess of patient need.'

Ms Michaels says the PBS listing changes mark a significant member-driven milestone in this important area of medicines safety risk.

'Hospital pharmacists are passionate about protecting the health and recovery of patients as they receive care in hospital, and our members should be proud of these patient-centred improvements they have helped initiate.

'Importantly, we remain committed to further reform, as our data showed less than 5% of hospitals have formal opioid stewardship programs, which are showing good progress in reducing unnecessary opioid supply, and even fewer have invested in other innovative responses to address this ongoing problem.

'In the immediate term, this year we are pleased to roll out education on appropriate use of opioids and pain management alternatives – alongside the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia in partnership with the Therapeutics Goods Administration – and we will continue to build and strengthen relationships that support optimal pharmacist and prescribing practices, in the interests of community safety.'

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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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