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## Medicine safety experts lay out the path to reducing harm caused by medicines in Australia

A consortia of Australia's leading medicine safety experts has endorsed calls to turn the tide on unsafe medicine use and better protect Australians against preventable harm caused by medicines.

In a new report released today, the consortia made consensus recommendations which will help shape Australia's response to the declaration of medicine safety and quality use of medicines as Australia's 10th National Health Priority Area in November 2019.

With the long-awaited review of the National Medicines Policy starting next month, there is no better time to ensure medicines safety is front and centre of Australia's National Medicines Policy.

The ten recommendations seek to mitigate preventable medicine-related harm through:

- Development of clear medicine safety targets, benchmarks and improved clinical governance in primary care and aged care
- Implementation of national medicine reporting systems to capture and respond to medicine errors, near misses, adverse reactions to medicines and health literacy gaps
- Fast-tracking of Australia's digital health medicine safety initiatives.

The recommendations come off the back of last week's NPS MedicineWise symposium last week where health and government leaders lamented the lack of good data on medicine errors and data on the patient impacts of those errors. The cost of medicine-related harm to the health system alone is estimated at more than \$1.4 billion each year.

The report and its consensus recommendations are an outcome from a collaborative project between consortia partners which examined how to reduce the preventable harm caused by medicines in Australia.

Comprised of 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, the consortia are committed to working with government to help make medicine use in Australia safer.

"Medicine safety is a priority for us all. We stand ready to help the government make these whole-of-health system changes which are needed to dramatically reduce medicine-related hospitalisations and deaths," PSA National President A/Professor Freeman said.

"An overhaul of clinical governance in primary care and aged care is needed to achieve this; as was recently recognised by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and the Australian Commission for Safety and Quality in Health Care."

CHF CEO, Leanne Wells, said:

"Consumers have lived experience with their medicines, but our health system doesn't capture this well. It is only by having good systems to hear, prioritise and respond to their experiences that we will reduce harm and shift to genuinely consumer-centred care."

SHPA CEO, Kristin Michaels, said:

"On behalf of our members SHPA is a proud consortium partner and we reiterate the report's focus on the person receiving care as the centre of the hard work to come to improve Medication Safety for all Australians."

"Hospital pharmacists provide care at the crucial intersection of hospital and primary care, and as Geriatric Medicines Pharmacists in aged care, and we welcome the focus on higher risk populations, which aligns with our Medication Safety Position Statement (2020) recommendations."

"Our members are dedicated to evidence-based use of medicines and will be powerful drivers of the system change required to reduce medication-related harm, and improve the quality of life of Australians regardless of where and how they receive care."

NPS MedicineWise CEO, Adj A/Prof Steve Morris, said:

"We need to cherish the ethos of quality use of medicines, and ensure that the core principle of primacy of the consumer is always upheld,"

"I would like to see all key stakeholders working in genuine partnership to support shared goals and achieve improved health outcomes for healthcare consumers through the safe and quality use of medicines. Key to this is a concept of quality use of medicine (QUM) stewardship, developing performance measures and prioritisation."

Professor Carl Kirkpatrick, from Monash University's Centre for Medicine Use and Safety, said:

"Medicine safety is a widespread national health challenge, particularly among vulnerable populations such as elderly Australians and those with chronic health conditions. Urgent action is needed to tackle pressing concerns such as polypharmacy, managing medication errors, transitions of care, and the mismanagement of medication regimens - this report is a much needed Launchpad to help inform the key changes needed to improve medicine safety and the quality use of medicines in Australia."

Professor Andrew McLachlan, Head of School and Dean from the Sydney Pharmacy School at the University of Sydney, said:

"This landmark report, developed with input from across the sector, well and truly puts vulnerable people and their health at the centre of Australia's medication safety agenda. The recommendations on much

needed system changes, and especially the urgent need to measure outcomes that matter, have the potential to transform quality use of medicines in this country and significantly reduce preventable medication-related harm.”

“We thank all consortia partners for their collaborative and good-faith approach in forming these consensus recommendations. We also thank all delegates who contributed to this report through their involvement in the kick-off stakeholder forum in December 2019,” A/Prof Freeman said.

“Achieving medicine safety is focussed on one thing; reducing preventable harm caused by medicines. The time for continued action is now.”

*The report can be found [here](#).*

**Media contact:** **PSA Media** – Matt Glasson 0487 922 176

**CHF Media** – Mark Metherell 0429 111 986

**SHPA Media** – Susie Brown 0437 119 286

**Monash University Media** – Kate Carthew 0438 674 814

**University of Sydney Media** - 02 8627 0246

## **Background**

PSA's *Medicine Safety: Take care* report (2019) revealed:

- over 250,000 Australians are admitted to hospital each year due to a problem with their medicines. An additional 400,000 Australians present to an emergency department each year due to a problem with their medicines
- this costs the health system alone over \$1.4 billion, which is likely to be a significant underestimation. It also does not reflect costs of lost productivity or quality of life
- at least 50% of this harm is preventable

PSA's *Medicine Safety: Aged Care* report (2020) revealed:

- 98% of people living in residential aged care have a problem with their medicines
- 50% of people with dementia are taking medicines with anticholinergic properties, which can worsen confusion and other symptoms of dementia.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety interim report found:

- while 61% of residents are regularly taking psychotropic medicines, this is only clearly justified in about 10% of cases in which they are prescribed in residential aged care.

PSA's *Medicine Safety: Rural and remote care* (2021) revealed:

- 1.3 million rural and remote Australians do not take their medicines at all or as intended adding an estimated \$2.03 billion to our annual health care costs