

Media release

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Federal digital image prescription changes welcome, further states' support needed

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) has welcomed the Federal Government announcement enabling hospital pharmacists to supply PBS medicines using digital image prescriptions as a key step to improving patient safety amid the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

Announced yesterday by the Federal Department of Health, the legislative instrument states: 'An approved hospital authority may supply a pharmaceutical benefit to a person on the first presentation of a prescription if a PBS prescriber has given the approved hospital authority dispenser a digital image of the prescription or a copy of the prescription'.

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says the Federal Government is to be commended for approaches to minimise hospital foot traffic and protect hospital inpatients.

'In a rapid shift during COVID-19, hospitals have implemented telehealth consultations and prescribing of key PBS medicines for hospital outpatients to reduce the need for patients to attend hospitals in person.

'This is particularly important for hospital outpatients who are undergoing chemotherapy, have had an organ transplant or are taking immunosuppressive medicines and are therefore at high risk of becoming unwell during the COVID-19 pandemic.

'SHPA has advocated strongly that hospital pharmacists should be able to supply PBS medicines off digital image prescriptions as a further preventative step, and we welcome the Federal Government's legislative changes on behalf of our members and their frontline colleagues.'

In support of the new regulations, the Victorian Government yesterday issued a public health emergency order to enable pharmacists to supply a Schedule 4 medicine (excluding drugs of dependence) on a digital image of an original paper prescription transmitted by the prescriber.

Ms Michaels says the unique challenge of COVID-19 has required rapid agility across the health sector.

'With Australia's caseload peak now anticipated in the next few weeks and broad social restrictions in place, this is a critical time in our efforts to mitigate the harm caused by coronavirus.

'We welcome the Victorian Government's support for the new provisions and call on other states and territories to enact new amendments to complement Federal initiatives, which will help ensure hospital outpatients can access their key medicines while minimising attendances to hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic.'

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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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