



OPEN LETTER 09 JUNE 2023

Open Letter to all Federal Parliamentarians

Dear Senators and Members of Parliament,

RE: 60 DAY DISPENSING

The Government will soon move to introduce regulations into the Parliament that will enable pharmacies to dispense up to 60 days' worth of medication to reduce costs and improve healthcare access for consumers. We fully support this long overdue change.

On behalf of our collective memberships, which represent over 50,000 health care practitioners, and almost 10 million of the most vulnerable health consumers in Australia, we call on you to put consumers first and support this initiative.

60 Day Dispensing will:

- ✓ Implement a recommendation from the independent Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC).
- ✓ Be safe, applying to around one third of PBS subsidised medicines, and only available where it is deemed safe and appropriate by a patient's doctor.
- ✓ **Benefit approximately 6 million people with chronic and ongoing conditions** – including a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) Australians who have a higher prevalence of chronic conditions.
- ✓ **Save these consumers up to \$180 a year**, and *even more* for people taking multiple medicines. Pensioners and concession card holders will save up to \$43.90 per year for each selected medicine. These savings are needed now more than ever, as Australians are battling increasing cost of living pressures.
- ✓ Mean **fewer trips to pick up medicines and repeat scripts** - helping those who find it difficult to get to a pharmacy due to their chronic and ongoing conditions and those in rural and remote communities who must travel longer distances and may find it costly and inconvenient to collect their medicines. This is also especially important **for those who find community pharmacies culturally unsafe or inappropriate.**
- ✓ **Bring Australia into line with other high-income countries** like New Zealand, the USA and Canada, where consumers already have access to multiple months of medication on a single prescription.
- ✓ **Free up GP appointments for other patients**, increasing access to GPs.
- ✓ **Improve system equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people** who suffer more from chronic disease. There is strong empirical evidence showing the value of medicine cost reduction for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- ✓ Increase convenience for consumers, which will increase medication adherence.

The measure will NOT:

Contribute to medicine shortages.

It has been [reported](#) that only three products eligible for 60-day scripts are currently listed in critical shortage. These include two strengths of the same tablet, used for treating hypertension, and another type of tablet for treating recurrent streptococcal infections – which is already unavailable.

People are still going to take the same amount of medicine - all that is changing is how often it is dispensed. Claims of medicines shortages have been publicly refuted by PBAC and, from 1 July, medicine suppliers will be required to stockpile between four and six months of essential medicines. The change to dispensing will be introduced in phases, giving industry time to adjust.

Pharmacy is in a strong position and this is a relatively small total change to business, including government reinvestment.

The reduction in dispensing fees amounts to approximately [1.5% of total pharmacy revenue](#). We welcome the fact that the Government has chosen to reinvest every dollar of the \$1.2b in Budget savings generated by this measure back into the pharmacy sector. We note also that the Government will also redirect \$350m in funding for on-site pharmacists in Government-funded aged care homes to community pharmacy.

A [recent Westpac report](#) found that total consumer spending in pharmacies had risen by 33.7% between July 2019 and January this year. The report made it clear that the pharmacies are changing their business models and looking to provide more services, a significant factor in their revenue growth. The reinvestment of savings is entirely consistent with the direction that pharmacy is moving, noting the Government will phase changes in as part of a transition process. Clearly, the Government has sought to balance the needs of pharmacies while also ensuring that people receive more affordable, accessible medicines.

This policy change will work to the overwhelming benefit of patients who are currently paying more for medicines than they should. We hope that you will put patients first in any consideration of this policy as it makes its way through the Parliament, particularly as costs of medicines has been widely identified as a barrier for some patients as they struggle with the growing costs of living.

Yours sincerely

Dr Nicole Higgins, RACGP President
Prof Stephen Robson, AMA President
Leanne Boase, CEO Australian College of Nurse Practitioners
Vicki Durston, Director Policy, Advocacy & Support Services, Breast Cancer Network Australia

Dr Dawn Casey, Acting CEO National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
Marina Chand, Co-Chair Australian Multicultural Health Collaborative (FECCA)
Mark Brooke, CEO Lung Foundation Australia
Michele Goldman, CEO Asthma Australia

