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

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

In a new report released today, the consortium 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.

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 month's NPS MedicineWise Symposium, hosted by NPS MedicineWise, 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 hospital admissions alone is estimated to cost the health system more than \$1.4 billion each year.

The report and its consensus recommendations are an outcome of a collaborative project between consortium 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 consortium is committed to working with government to help make medicine use in Australia safer.

"Medicine safety is a priority for everyone. Pharmacists, as medicine experts, stand ready with government to make these whole-of-health system changes which are needed to dramatically reduce

medicine-related harm. The refresh of our National Medicines Policy presents an ideal opportunity to start this work," PSA National President A/Professor Freeman said.

"Given the findings by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, it is critical that we focus our initial efforts in aged care and then quickly look to curbing harm from high-risk scenarios such as those prescribed antipsychotics, opioids, or sleeping tablets and those prescribed multiple inappropriate medicines."

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, as do 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 consortium 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.

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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