

28 February 2024

Andrew Barr MLA
ACT Chief Minister and Treasurer
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601

Email: budgetconsultation@act.gov.au

Dear Chief Minister,

The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) thanks you for the opportunity to provide a submission through the 2024-25 Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government Budget consultation process.

As medicine safety experts and one of our most accessible frontline health workforces, pharmacists can and should play a greater role in improving access to medicines and health care for the Australian population and individual patients to improve the health of all Australians.

In this submission, PSA makes three recommendations to directly improve the health and safety of Canberrans, supported by investment in the 2024-25 territory budget.

Recommendations

1. Support early identification of mental health issues and provision of appropriate initial support to people experiencing mental ill health by funding the delivery of mental health first aid training for all members of the pharmacy team including pharmacists and support staff across all practice settings.
2. Expand options for Canberrans to access treatment for opioid dependence by strengthening the ACT pharmacist workforce capability to administer prescribed injectable buprenorphine.
3. Ensure equitable access to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme medicines for ACT public hospital patients by establishing a Pharmaceutical Reform Agreement.

Sincerely,

Olivia Collenette
ACT Branch President
Pharmaceutical Society of Australia

About PSA

PSA is the only peak national professional pharmacy organisation representing all of Australia's 36,000 pharmacists working in all sectors and across all locations.

PSA is committed to supporting pharmacists to help Australians access quality, safe, equitable, efficient and effective health care. PSA believes the expertise of pharmacists can be better utilised to address the healthcare needs of all Australians.

PSA works to identify, unlock, and advance opportunities for pharmacists to realise their full potential, to be appropriately recognised and remunerated.

PSA has a strong and engaged membership base that provides high-quality health care and are the custodians for safe and effective medicine use for the Australian community.

PSA leads and supports innovative and evidence-based healthcare service delivery by pharmacists. PSA provides high-quality practitioner development and practice support to pharmacists and is the custodian of the professional practice standards and guidelines to ensure quality and integrity in the practice of pharmacy.

In the ACT, there are 773 registered pharmacists working in community pharmacy, hospital, general practice, aged care, Aboriginal health services, government, the military and within other private sector organisations.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Support early identification of mental health issues and provision of appropriate initial support to people experiencing mental ill health.

PSA recommends the ACT Government fund the delivery of mental health first aid training for all members of the pharmacy team including pharmacists and support staff across all practice settings.

The challenge

Mental health conditions are common and often result in poor health outcomes. According to the National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing, in 2020–2022, of the 347,900 people aged 16–85 years in the ACT, 45.7% or 159,000 people had a lifetime mental disorder, and 25.5% (88,800 people) had a 12-month mental disorder.¹

Mental health conditions are a leading cause of disease burden in Australia and leading cause of death for young people. The Australian Burden of Disease Study 2023 estimated that mental and substance use disorders are responsible for 14.5% of the total burden of disease for Australia.²

The Australian Capital Territory Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan 2019-2024 notes:

There is a need for the ACT mental health system to achieve a sustainable balance between tertiary services including crisis and acute services, community supports that are well-placed to respond early to prevent deterioration and population level interventions to promote mental health and wellbeing and prevent mental illness and suicide.³

Pharmacists, as highly accessible healthcare professionals, regularly come into contact with individuals dealing with mental health problems or crises. The 2023 PSA medicine safety report, "Medicine Safety: Mental Health Care," emphasises the critical role pharmacists can play in early intervention and referring patients to appropriate care.⁴

The proposed approach

Mental health first aid refers to specialised training programs that aim to equip people with the skills and knowledge to recognise early signs of mental health conditions and to offer appropriate support

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023). National study of mental health and wellbeing. At: www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/latest-release

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Australian Burden of Disease Study 2023. At: www.aihw.gov.au/reports/burden-of-disease/australian-burden-of-disease-study-2023/contents/interactive-data-on-disease-burden/burden-of-disease-in-australia

³ Australian Capital Territory Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan 2019-2024. Part A: The framework. Canberra: Capital Health Network; 2019. At: www.chnact.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CHN-Mental-Health-and-Suicide-Prevention-Plan.pdf

⁴ Pharmaceutical Society of Australia. Medicine safety: mental health care. Canberra: PSA; 2023.

to people in the community with mental health conditions.⁵ PSA recommends the ACT Government fund mental health first aid training for all members of the pharmacy team including pharmacists and support staff across all practice settings.

Why it will work

Early detection of mental health issues can improve patient outcomes and ensure individuals receive appropriate care from the most appropriate mental health experts.

A recent Australian study demonstrated that training pharmacists to support individuals with severe and ongoing mental health problems not only reduced stigma but also boosted the pharmacists' confidence, comfort, and understanding in offering medication counselling to those living with mental health conditions.⁶

Budget implications and funding model

Cost estimate is \$771,000 over 3 years to train 1000 pharmacists and pharmacy staff across the ACT.

Benefits for Canberrans

- Guidance and referral for patients to connect with appropriate mental health care earlier.
 - Improved patient well-being.
 - Reduction in healthcare expenditure from less reliance on acute care.
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⁵ Kitchener BA, Jorm AF, Kelley CM. Mental health first aid manual (4th ed.). Mental Health First Aid Australia, 2017.

⁶ Carpini JA, Sharma A, Kubicki Evans M, Jumani S, Boyne E, Clifford R, Ashoorian D.. Pharmacists and Mental Health First Aid training: A comparative analysis of confidence, mental health assistance behaviours and perceived barriers. Early Intervention in Psychiatry, 2023;17(7):670–80.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Expand options for Canberrans to access treatment for opioid dependence by strengthening the ACT pharmacist workforce capability to administer prescribed injectable buprenorphine.

PSA recommends the ACT Government strengthen primary care capacity and workforce capability to administer prescribed injectable buprenorphine by funding the training of ACT pharmacists to administer this medicine.

The challenge

Long-acting injectable buprenorphine (LAIB) is a prescribed medicine for the treatment of opioid dependence. It has an improved safety profile, simplified regimen and provides greater convenience for patients, compared to alternative treatments.

Pharmacists play a key role in the delivery of treatments for opioid dependence in the ACT through the dispensing and administration of medicines. Medicines for the treatment of opioid dependence, including LAIB, are subsidised under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and community pharmacies are funded by the Commonwealth to administer LAIB to patients.

Pharmacists administering LAIB in the ACT must have completed an accredited course on administering medicines by injection. They are also required to undergo supervised practical injection training for administration of LAIB.

Despite having the authority to administer LAIB, ACT pharmacists are currently unable to easily access appropriate supervised practical injection training in the ACT. This has resulted in low pharmacist participation in LAIB administration and subsequently there is limited access for patients to this treatment.

The proposed approach

PSA recommends the ACT Government fund supervised practical LAIB administration training for ACT pharmacists.

Why it will work

Pharmacists are skilled at administering injections and have administered over 13 million injections through COVID-19 and influenza vaccination programs. Pharmacies are open extended hours affording people the ability to access treatment at times that suit them. Supporting ACT pharmacists to complete the additional training required to administer LAIB will allow the workforce to be fully utilised and provide equitable access to all Canberrans seeking treatment with LAIB.

Budget implications and funding model

Based on providing face to face training in LAIB administration to 80 pharmacists, PSA estimates the costs for this proposal would be \$113,000.

Benefits for Canberrans

- Reduced pressure on already stretched opioid treatment services in the ACT.
 - Better quality of life for people receiving treatment for opioid dependence due to increased access to care.
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RECOMMENDATION 3

Ensure equitable access to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medicines for ACT public hospital patients by establishing a Pharmaceutical Reform Agreement (PRA).

PSA recommends the ACT Government take immediate action to establish a PRA with the Commonwealth.

The challenge

The ACT and New South Wales are the only Australian jurisdictions who are not signatories to the PRAs introduced in 2001 to support the implementation of the PBS in hospitals.

The PRAs enable public hospitals to prescribe and dispense PBS-subsidised medicines, chemotherapy drugs and highly specialised drugs to day-admitted patients, outpatients, and patients upon discharge. In states with PRAs a patient discharged from a public hospital can receive 30 days' supply of PBS medicines to support their safe transition to the community and continuity of care and allow them enough time to make a GP appointment to obtain further prescriptions, if required.

Patients discharged from ACT hospitals receive a small quantity of prescribed medicines (as little as 3 days' supply) and, with the current long waiting times to see a GP, may run out of medicines before they can secure an appointment.

PSA understands that the ACT government has agreed in-principle to establish a PRA for ACT public hospitals but has not taken any action toward implementation. This intention to become a signatory is reiterated in the *ACT Health Services Plan 2022-2030*.

The proposed approach

PSA recommends the ACT Government action its in-principle commitment to establish a Pharmaceutical Reform Agreement, ensuring adequate access to medicines by patients upon discharge from hospital.

Why it will work

A PRA will support continuity of care for patients being discharged from hospitals and take pressure off primary care by enabling public hospitals in the ACT to supply medications under the PBS to patients on discharge.

Budget implications and funding model

Establishing a PRA will require legislative amendments and contractual agreements to be made by the ACT Government. Funding will be required to implement this change in ACT public hospitals.

Benefits for Canberrans

- Patients will be better supported to safely transition from hospital to the community with enough medicines to prevent a relapse of their condition or delayed recovery.
 - Reduced pressure on primary care.
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