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NSW budget provides opportunity for government to utilise pharmacists skills to improve community health outcomes

The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia has called on the New South Wales Government to action five key areas to improve access to medicines and health care for the NSW population in its 2021-22 Budget Submission.

The PSA recommends regulatory change to enable pharmacists to administer additional vaccines such as the COVID-19 vaccine and travel vaccines. In addition, funding of vaccines to eligible persons through the National Immunisation Program and state-funded programs should be made available through community pharmacies to increase access and herd immunity.

PSA NSW Branch President Chelsea Felkai said in the past 12 months, the NSW Government has facilitated greater access to vaccination by enabling pharmacists to vaccinate children aged 10 years and over for influenza and allowing pharmacist administered vaccination outside a community pharmacy.

“Australian pharmacists have been administering vaccines safely and effectively since 2014 and across all States and Territories since 2016,” she said.

“Community pharmacists provide an accessible and safe location for the delivery of vaccination services and by improving vaccination rates, pharmacies can help ease pressure on general practice and hospital emergency departments.

“PSA recommends using pharmacist immunisers for large scale rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine in NSW and ensuring the COVID-19 vaccine and service is funded when administered by any trained immuniser, including pharmacists.

“If the goal is to vaccinate as many people as possible, safely and as soon as possible, then pharmacist immunisers must be involved in the administration of the COVID-19 vaccine”.

The PSA has also called on the New South Wales Government to allocate \$7.5 million to facilitate and fund re-direction of non-urgent emergency presentations to community pharmacists.

In 2018-2019, there were 8.4 million presentations to Australian public hospital emergency departments. Of these, 2,976,532 emergency department presentations were in NSW, with 335,836 (11%) of these being considered as non-urgent.

Ms Felkai said patients seeking care from the emergency department for conditions such as headaches, coughs and colds, earaches and other non-urgent conditions could instead visit their community pharmacy.

“There is strong evidence that the clinical advice provided by community pharmacists regarding symptoms of minor illness results in the same health outcomes as if the patient went to see their GP or attended the emergency department,” she said.

“Pharmacists can manage non-urgent conditions or low urgency conditions, provide the right level of care and mitigate funding and system inefficiencies as patients access professional support for conditions that can be self-managed or require referral.”

Other recommendations in the submission include support and funding of pharmacists to enable enhanced harm minimisation activities such as the administration of the buprenorphine injection for opioid agonist treatment in NSW. Improvements in opioid agonist treatment have broader health implications such as reducing the prevalence of infectious conditions in the wider community.

Further to this, additional funding is being sought to enable pharmacists to support positive health outcomes and patient self-care for Hepatitis C, in line with national and global elimination targets by 2030.

Additional funding to embed pharmacists in state funded aged care facilities to support medicine safety are in line with the PSA's medicine safety report.

Ms Felkai said medicines are the most common intervention in health care and alarmingly, problems with the use of medicines is also common, 250,000 hospital admissions a year across Australia with an annual cost of \$1.4 billion.

To view the 2021-22 NSW Budget Submission click here: <https://www.psa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Budget-Submission-2021-22-NSW-Final.pdf>

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