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Co-pay cut in then out of Fed Budget

SCRAPPED Federal Government plans to cut the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) general co-payment by \$10, show the Coalition is aware of the need to make medicine more affordable, Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Trent Twomey, believes.

While Federal Treasurer, Josh Frydenberg's Budget will see the PBS Safety Net Threshold cut by \$85 (to \$1,457.10), his colleagues, Assistant Treasurer, Michael Sukkar, and Minister for Superannuation, Financial Services and the Digital Economy, Senator Jane Hume, both proposed legislation under the *Treasury Laws Amendment (Cost of Living Support and Other Measures) Bill 2022*, that would see the general co-payment fall from \$42.50 to \$32.50 from 01 May.

However, a spokesperson for the Department of Health told *Pharmacy Daily* that "the information provided in the initial Hansard [the parliamentary record]

relating to the *Treasury Laws Amendment (Cost of Living Support and Other Measures) Bill 2022* was not correct and has since been corrected".

The revised Hansard entries note the change to the Safety Net Threshold is expected to benefit more than 2.4 million Australians.

The scrapped \$10 reduction in the PBS general co-payment fell short of the \$19 fee the Guild has proposed as part of its Affordable Medicines Now campaign.

Twomey said the presence of the planned cut in what appears to have been an early draft of the Bill, showed that the Government "acknowledges the reality that many Australians who are struggling from paycheque to paycheque to afford their medicines cannot wait until they are \$1,450 out-of-pocket to reach the PBS Safety Net".

"We have been working with the Government to find a solution that



will help these Australians," he said.

"We agreed with the Government that a \$10 co-payment would not go far enough, as it helps only 3% of Australians.

"The Guild continues to work together with the Government on a solution that would help the most people.

"We believe that a larger reduction in the co-payment is needed to help the 24% of people struggling to afford their prescriptions and [the] 14% who have been forced to skip them entirely."

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news, plus a full page from *Pharmacium*.

Butler commits to meds deals

SHADOW Health Minister, Mark Butler, has confirmed Labor's support for the Government's five-year deals with Medicines Australia and the Generic and Biosimilar Medicines Association (GBMA) to combat medicines shortages - both of which start in Jul.

Speaking at the GBMA Budget Week industry luncheon, Butler noted "the security of supply [created by the deals], which came at a time when there was heightened concern, was a great achievement".

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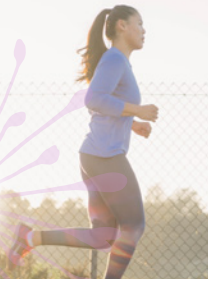
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Jardiance listing

SGLT-2 inhibitor, Jardiance (empagliflozin 10mg) is now available through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) for patients who do not have type 2 diabetes.

The Federal Government has listed the treatment for adults with symptomatic heart failure with reduced ejection fraction (HFrEF) as an adjunct to standard of care therapy – irrespective of the presence of type 2 diabetes from 01 Apr.

Heart Failure Association President, Professor Andrew Coats, said the listing will have a positive effect on the prognosis of Australians with a common and potentially life-threatening form of chronic heart failure.

Wesfarmers eyes API opportunities

RETAIL giant, Wesfarmers, is planning to take significant steps to develop its new health division following the completion of its acquisition of pharmacy wholesaler, Australian Pharmaceutical Industries (API) (PD 31 Mar).

In a statement to the Australian Securities Exchange (ASX) confirming the implementation of the scheme of arrangement which saw Wesfarmers' subsidiary WFM Investments Pty Ltd, acquire 100% of the share in API, the group's Managing Director, Rob Scott, pledged to support pharmacy owners.

"The completion of this acquisition is an exciting milestone for API and Wesfarmers. API will be the foundation business of our new Health division as we develop capabilities and invest in the growing health, wellbeing and beauty sector," he said.

"We see opportunities to strengthen the competitive

position of API and its partners, by investing in expanding product ranges, improving supply chain capabilities and enhancing the online experience for customers," he said.

"Wesfarmers supports the community pharmacy model, including the pharmacy ownership and location rules, and we are looking forward to working closely with API's pharmacy partners, suppliers and other industry stakeholders."

In a separate statement to the ASX confirming the completion of the \$744 million, API announced that Board Chair, Kenneth Gunderson-Briggs, and Directors, Lee Ausburn, Jennifer MacDonald, Janine Allis, Clive Stiff, and former Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, George Tambassis, had resigned.

MEANWHILE the ASX has announced that API "will be removed from the official list at the close of trading" today.

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Asthma drug gets PBS listing

ADULTS with severe asthma will be able to access three-in-one treatment, Trelegy Ellipta 200 (fluticasone furoate, umeclidinium and vilanterol) through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) from today.

The single inhaler triple therapy is expected to offer a new treatment option for between 52,800 and 176,000 Australian patients affected by the chronic condition.

Welcoming the listing decision, Australian respiratory specialist Professor Greg King said that having access to a new option was important for Australians with severe asthma.

"We need to help patients with severe asthma to control their symptoms, such as breathing difficulties and improve their quality of life," he said.

Boosting biosimilar uptake critical

IMPROVING the penetration of biosimilar medicines is key to unlocking headroom in the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme to list costly new medicines, Generic and Biosimilar Medicines Association (GBMA) Independent Chair, Jane Halton, believes.

Addressing the GBMA's Industry Budget Week luncheon yesterday, Halton said the sector

was committed to ensuring Australia will "never again... have an argument about whether we can afford to list that innovative but expensive medicine."

Halton also thanked outgoing Federal Health Minister, Greg Hunt, for his efforts in ensuring patients retained access to medicines throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Dispensary Corner

THOSE wacky Japanese health and beauty manufacturers are at it again, with the launch of a new bath bomb created with the shape and colour of human excrement.

That's right, the so-called "Rainbomb Mini Poop Chocolate" (pictured below) has been launched as a special limited edition bathing accessory, available for online purchase at various Japanese retailers including Plaza, Loft and Don Quijote as well as via a site called Dreams Online.

If washing yourself in turd-coloured water is not particularly appealing, fear not - the product turns green, yellow and pink as it dissolves.

And don't worry about the smell - it's fragranced with the sweet aroma of chocolate.

Other poo-shaped bath bombs in the range are scented with peach and grape flavours for those who prefer a more fruity bathing experience.

The Mini Poop Chocolates cost 550 yen (about A\$5), with the manufacturer noting it comes in an eye-catching package, "recommended as a small gift for those who like the 'poop' motif".



Aged care plans need pharmacists

PLANS to address Australia's aged care crisis laid out in last night's Opposition Budget Reply must also include funding for geriatric medicine pharmacists, the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) says.

Welcoming Labor Leader, Anthony Albanese's plan to require aged care facilities to have a registered nurse on site at all time, SHPA CEO Kristen Michaels, said ensuring residents have access to specialist pharmacist support would be critical for reducing medicine-related harm.

"Having a registered nurse on-site at all times in aged care facilities is important, given the many medication-related issues that cannot be addressed or resolved without nursing staff on-site, however the crucial role of pharmacy in aged care is undeniable," she said.

"Australian research indicates 91% of aged care residents take at least five regular medicines, and 65% take more than 10 every day, and

we also know antipsychotics are inappropriately used in aged care, which pharmacists can detect and prevent.

"To complement and maximise the value of this investment, commensurate funding and support for embedding geriatric medicine pharmacists into residential aged care facilities is required, to reduce the incidence of medication-related hospital admissions."

With a Federal Election looming Michaels called on Labor to match or surpass the Coalition's pledge to embed pharmacy in residential aged care facilities (PD 28 Mar).

"SHPA is pleased our early call for investment in clinical pharmacy services for aged care residents – including 1:200 pharmacist to resident ratios – has been embraced this week by the current Government, an important step toward reduce medicines misuse and preventable harm among this vulnerable cohort.

"Should we see a change



of Government this year this momentum must not be lost, and we will continue to push strongly for broader access to the unique expertise of hospital pharmacists, to identify and manage medication-related issues as early as possible and prevent admissions to hospitals."

Michaels also welcomed the Opposition Leader's plan to invest in providing additional university and TAFE places, saying there was a need to boost pharmacist and pharmacy technician training opportunities.

FIP to host COVID-19 update

THE International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) will host a webinar next week looking at the COVID-19 pandemic and discussing steps that can be taken to prepare for future health emergencies.

The webinar will coincide with the 800th day of the pandemic, and will also feature the launch of FIP's SustainabilityRx website.

A host of international pharmacy leaders will participate in the event.

CLICK HERE to register.

Hunt commits to Doctor of Pharmacy

STUDENTS training to become pharmacist in Australia will one day be able to obtain a doctoral title, Federal Health Minister, Greg Hunt, says.

Speaking at the Australian Pharmacy Professional Conference last week, Hunt reiterated the Coalition's commitment to take all reasonable steps available to them to enable the holder of an Australian Qualifications framework Level 9 Masters Degree (extended) in pharmacy to be treated by exemption as a Level 10 qualification similar to the treatment of other health

professions covered under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, as agreed to in the Seventh Community Pharmacy Agreement (PD 23 Jun 2020).

"We are committed to an important thing, which is the doctoral title going forwards for people training in pharmacy in Australia," he said.

"That's something that the Coalition will continue to pursue in the future."

Both Charles Darwin University (PD 28 Jan) and the University of Sydney (PD 22 Feb) have outlined plans for doctoral courses.

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