



Australian College of Nurse Practitioners response to:

Queensland Parliament Economics and Governance
Committee

- Pharmacy Business Ownership Bill 2023

Contact:

Policy Advisor

Australian College of Nurse Practitioners

PO Box 33175 Melbourne Vic 3004

Office: St Kilda Rd Towers, Suite 502

1 Queens Road Melbourne

policy@acnp.org.au

1300 433 660

www.acnp.org.au

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EGC@parliament.qld.gov.au

Committee Secretary
Economics and Governance Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Committee Secretary

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Pharmacy Business Ownership Bill 2023.

The Australian College of Nurse Practitioners (ACNP) is the national peak organisation for Nurse Practitioners, advancing nursing practice and consumer access to health care. A key focus for the role and scope of practice development for Nurse Practitioners is on unmet needs within the community and increasing access to health care.

The proposed Pharmacy Business Ownership Bill 2023 outlines a comprehensive and commendable set of policy objectives, reinforcing the need for a clear and regulated framework in the pharmacy sector.

Of notable interest to the ACNP is the retention of ownership requirements outlined in the 2001 Act, providing transparency on who may own or hold an interest in a pharmacy business. The Bill also retains the limits on the number of pharmacy businesses a person may be interested in from the 2001 Act. The ACNP notes that the proposed legislation retains and clarifies the existing requirements relating to pharmacy ownership. While we agree with much of it, our submission addresses two key issues - ownership and location rules, from the perspective of limiting access to affordable medicines.

We see the merits of establishing a separate statutory authority, such as a regulatory council, to ensure consistency with the approach in most other Australian jurisdictions, including New South Wales (NSW), Victoria, South Australia, and Western Australia, where

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regulatory councils administer pharmacy business ownership laws.

Further, the prohibition of issuing licenses for pharmacy businesses located in supermarkets is a reasonable measure. This ensures that pharmacies remain separate entities, protecting their role as specialised and safe healthcare services. However, we are apprehensive that prohibiting supermarket and pharmacy services integration in remote areas might restrict medication access, particularly if the standalone pharmacy service becomes non-viable.

However, this Bill specifically restricts a pharmacist's ownership, and we do not align strictly with that view.

The Pharmacy Business Ownership Bill 2023 presents a robust approach to pharmacy regulation, addressing key aspects that ensure the integrity, accessibility, and quality of pharmacy services in Queensland. However, we would also like to add the following notes for consideration, as we have concerns about the restrictions being reinforced, specifically about ownership. In the explanatory notes, on Page 3 - we note this statement:

'During Committee proceedings, several submitters expressed views that a proprietor who was not a pharmacist would be more likely to place profit before patient welfare than a proprietor pharmacist, to the detriment of consumers. This could reduce access to certain essential medicines for some community members but have low or zero profit margins. Some noted that non-pharmacist proprietors may also be less likely to offer services that do not return a profit – for example, delivery to homebound patients, blood pressure and diabetes screening, medication packaging and health advice and education.'

ACNP comments that this view is questionable, as demonstrated during the introduction of 60-day prescriptions, pharmacists were publicly withdrawing from non-profitable activities such as blood pressure checks and other health screening activities. *ACNP believes a **non-pharmacist health professional** would **not** be more likely to withdraw non-profitable health services. However, we agree that a **non-health professional may be** more likely to.* This is an important point to note. Commercial interest exists across all primary care, as well as in pharmacy. It cannot be assumed that all pharmacists will put health and well-being ahead of commercial interests, nor can it be assumed that other health professionals will not.

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Commercial interest must be acknowledged and managed across **all sectors** of health.

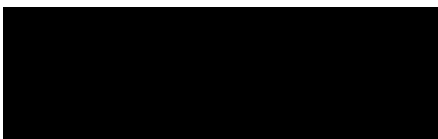
ACNP would also like to raise for noting the following reports and findings:

- The Competition Policy Review¹ conducted by an independent panel of experts in 2015 recommended as part of immediate reform the removal of pharmacy location and ownership rules, concluding they did not serve the objectives of the National Medicine Policy as it limits both consumers' ability to choose where to obtain pharmacy services and suppliers' ability to meet consumers' demands.
- The Productivity Commission Research Paper – Efficiency in Health² in April 2015 stated that there is no reason to treat pharmacy differently from other sectors of the economy and recommended removing location and ownership restrictions.
- The Review of Pharmacy Remuneration and Regulation Final Report³ in September 2017 recommended that the Australian Government should reform the Pharmacy Location Rules to remove barriers to community access and competition between pharmacies and to ensure they continue to support equitable and affordable access to medicines for all Australians in accord with the National Medicines Policy.

In general, location and ownership restrictions should be relaxed to allow other health professionals to have ownership of pharmacies and ensure affordable and equitable access to medicines in all regions of Australia.

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this important review. We are happy to be contacted to participate further or provide clarification.

Yours sincerely



Leanne Boase
Chief Executive Officer

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References

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2. Productivity Commission. *Efficiency in Health*. Commission Research Paper; 2015:JEL codes: I10, I18. <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/efficiency-health/efficiency-health.pdf>
3. Commonwealth of Australia. *Review of Pharmacy Remuneration and Regulation – Final Report*. 2017. https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2018-05/apo-nid143826_1.pdf

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