



Committee Secretary
HCDSDFVPC
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Mr Harper,

RE: Inquiry into the establishment of a pharmacy council and transfer of pharmacy ownership in Queensland

We have been made aware of the abovementioned Inquiry, and I write to offer the opinion of Glaucoma Australia on the issues laid out in the terms of reference.

Glaucoma Australia is the peak glaucoma awareness and support organisation for Australia. Our mission is to eliminate glaucoma blindness through early detection and treatment. We work proactively and collaboratively with health professionals including pharmacists to achieve this aim along with raising awareness of glaucoma and the risks people have of getting glaucoma. Glaucoma Australia seeks to raise awareness of this condition in order to find the estimated 150 000 Australians currently unaware of their glaucoma.

Pharmacists are an essential primary healthcare provider, who have an important role in the early detection and ongoing treatment of glaucoma and other chronic health conditions. This is particularly true in regional Queensland, where accessibility and affordability of health care services means patients rely on their community pharmacist. Some 87% of Australians live within 2.5km of a community pharmacy. Pharmacies enable access to PBS medications in a timely and affordable manner.

People living with glaucoma access their community pharmacists about five times for every consult with their GPs or ophthalmologist. Pharmacists contribute to patients managing their

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glaucoma, assisting with questions and concerns about conditions, and encouraging family members to be screened for glaucoma based on a 50% genetic predisposition for family members to also have glaucoma. In regional and rural communities, the pharmacist is frequently the only continuous and resident health professional for the community and provides a vital triage service in eye conditions. A pharmacist can advise whether a simple pharmacy medication, an optometrist, a GP, an ophthalmologist or an Emergency Department should be the next port of call.

Experience from other Australian States has demonstrated that a Pharmacy Council can be a vital support for maintaining standards. The focus should be on supporting the provision of quality pharmacy services, accessible patient support, medication expertise access and distribution of pharmacies to ensure community access to pharmacies across Queensland.

Glaucoma Australia supports a change in current regulations to allow pharmacists to properly support patients with the correct healthcare, starting with continuance of medication. Current laws only allow a 3 day emergency supply of a medication and mostly does not allow an original pack of a medication to be dispensed to a patient who currently uses the medication and is stable on it. For glaucoma, continued use of eye drops is essential, yet cannot by law be issued as an emergency supply due to bottles of eye drops unable to be broken into a 3 day supply. Pharmacists can contribute to ongoing adherence by replacing a bottle of eye drops in case of loss or inappropriate storage including exposure to excessive heat or accidental freezing. Approximately one half of glaucoma patients discontinue their eye drops or do not take as prescribed. An Access Economics report (Clear Focus; The Economic Impact of Vision Loss in Australia in 2009) predicted 801 000 Australians would be experiencing vision loss by 2020 with 5% directly due to glaucoma. While age-related macular degeneration is the biggest cause of blindness, 16% of Australians aged 40 or above have blindness caused by glaucoma. The same report calculated the total direct cost of treating eye disease was \$2.98 billion and growing by nearly 5% per annum. This does not include carer costs, lost productivity and costs associated with loss of wellbeing. Amending the regulations to enable pharmacists to support continuity of care by supplying essential PBS medications for people with diagnosed glaucoma will assist to improve these metrics and the quality of life for many Queenslanders. This move would be welcomed by Glaucoma Australia.



As a condition with chronic consequences, glaucoma requires ongoing management. There is no cure for glaucoma and once vision is lost, it cannot be regained. Early detection and adherence to treatment can halt or significantly slow progression. A key element for management of glaucoma is a skilled, informed and involved pharmacist.

Community pharmacies and pharmacists are helping Glaucoma Australia in the fight against glaucoma. Through this Inquiry, please consider the key role pharmacists play in providing accessible and affordable access to essential medications.

Annie Gibbins

CEO

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