

## Australian Medical Association Limited

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**Transcript:** AMA Vice President, Dr Danielle McMullen, Outlet: Channel 7 Sunrise, Wednesday, 26 April 2023

**Subject:** Two-months' prescribing changes

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DAVID KOCH: Now, pharmacists are up in arms over new medicine dispensing laws being announced today. They'll see refills for prescription drugs doubled from 30 to 60 days, with 12-month scripts available to treat chronic conditions. The government says the changes will save around 6 million Aussies up to \$180 a year, and also free up doctors' time. But the Pharmacy Guild says it will lead to medicine shortages and increased risk of overdose.

For more, I'm joined by the Vice President of the Australian Medical Association, Danielle McMullen. Danielle, doctors have been calling for these changes ever since the independent expert body recommended them five years ago. So it's taken its time. How will they make prescriptions cheaper?

DANIELLE MCMULLEN: It sure has taken its time, but it's a great announcement today for Australians who will get cheaper and more convenient access to medications and healthcare for their chronic conditions. And at the time we're talking about so many cost of living pressures, this will really ease the burden on patients across Australia. They'll be able to pick up two months' worth of medicines when they go to the pharmacy, so they only need to go there every two months and can go and see the doctor once a year for a script, so half as often having to go and see the doctor just for that routine check-up.

DAVID KOCH: I know. Jeez, it's annoying. A lot of older Australians are on certain drugs like statin, and to go back to the doctor every month to get a new prescription for something that's really common is incredibly difficult and must clog up doctor's surgeries.

DANIELLE MCMULLEN: Yeah. So at the moment, those patients have to go to the pharmacy every month, the doctor every six months. What this change will mean is they can go to the pharmacy every two months, and for pensioners, it means it will halve the cost of their medications, which is fantastic news, and they'll only need to go and see the doctor if it's medically appropriate once every year for that repeat script every year, and a check-up about their chronic condition to make sure they're getting the best care possible.

DAVID KOCH: Yeah, really is a good step forward, but the Pharmacy Guild — dead against it — and says changes will lead to medical *Hunger Games*. Now, has that got anything to do with the fact that we pay \$10 every time ago to the pharmacist to get a script filled?

DANIELLE MCMULLEN: Look, we know that these changes announced today will ease the pressure on patients, and that's what matters most. We know Australians are facing cost of living pressures and this will make their care cheaper and more accessible. There are some

situations of shortage in medicines at the moment, but there will be a staged approach to this announcement to ease the burden on those shortages, and there are government departments that monitor those. And of course we'll keep pressure on the government to make sure that Australians have access to the medicines they need.

DAVID KOCH: So do you think pharmacists are getting a bit greedy in this?

DANIELLE MCMULLEN: No, I think pharmacists across Australia do a fantastic job of talking to patients about medicine safety and helping us to make sure that patients are on the most appropriate medications. So we continue to want to work closely with pharmacy, and this means that patients will go there less often but be able to get more care and hopefully more time for discussing their medicines with their pharmacist.

DAVID KOCH: Yeah, fair point. Danielle, thanks for joining us.

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