

MEDIA RELEASE

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Coalition must not buckle to 60-day dispensing scare campaign

The Australian Medical Association has called on the federal opposition to clarify its position on 60-day dispensing saying an “observer would easily conclude the opposition was opposed to the policy” and was capitulating in the face of an irresponsible scare campaign.

There is growing concern the Coalition will try and block the government’s policy in the Senate, denying patients saving up to \$180 per year on selected Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) funded medicines.

In a letter to opposition leader Peter Dutton, AMA President Professor Steve Robson said it appeared the opposition had given in to an orchestrated scare campaign that puts profits before patients.

“The current scare campaign makes some grossly irresponsible claims and pharmacy owners have a long history of opposition to 60-day dispensing, despite the significant benefits for patients” Professor Robson said.

The AMA’s letter says the Coalition had previously caved in following a similar scare campaign on the same policy when it was last in government, adding that this had left patients paying unnecessary out-of-pocket costs for their medicines.

Professor Robson said the AMA was deeply concerned the Coalition would perpetuate the situation by seeking to block the government’s changes.

“60-day dispensing will deliver significant benefits for patients and the health system. By making medications more affordable, patients will be more likely to get their prescriptions filled and to take these medications as required. Better medication compliance will help keep people well and lighten the load on our health system, particularly our hospitals.

“From a workforce perspective, the policy means fewer visits to a GP, freeing up appointments for other patients and supporting GPs to spend more time with those patients that have more complex health care needs.”

Professor Robson said the AMA would be extremely disappointed if the Coalition sought to block the measure, adding that its failure to implement 60-day dispensing together with a history of cuts to health funding while in government, including the extended Medicare freeze, had undeniably led to increased out-of-pocket costs for patients.

“At a time when many people are struggling with cost-of-living pressures, the public positioning of the Coalition on 60-day dispensing suggests they are intent on having patients continue to absorb unnecessary financial pain with all the negative consequences this brings in terms of access to health care,” Professor Robson said.

“This policy was recommended by the independent Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee, an expert body. It has enormous benefits to the community and must be introduced.”

The AMA also welcomes the government’s recent decision to increase funding even further for rural pharmacies as part of efforts to support the transition to the new 60-day dispensing arrangements.

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