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**PHARMACY GUILD ACTIVELY UNDERMINING INDEPENDENT
 REGULATOR OVER ‘PRESCRIPTION-ONLY’ CODEINE RULING**

AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, today condemned the Pharmacy Guild of Australia for its irresponsible and unprincipled lobbying of State and Territory Governments to undermine the ruling by the independent Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) to make codeine a prescription-only medicine from 1 February 2018.

The Guild, which represents pharmacy owners, announced today that it had won the support of the NSW Nationals to sneakily use State legislation to allow pharmacies to avoid compliance with the TGA decision and put patients’ health at risk.

At the time of the TGA decision in August this year, the AMA warned that some groups would put self-interest ahead of patients’ best interests by using highly-paid lobbyists to influence or coerce State Governments to change, delay, or dilute the impact of the TGA decision – an outcome borne out by today’s Guild announcement with the NSW Nationals.

Dr Gannon said the AMA fully supports the independence of the TGA in making decisions about medicines scheduling.

“It is essential for public safety that the TGA makes evidence-based decisions about medicines, free from political interference and sectional interests,” Dr Gannon said.

“As doctors, we rely on the independence and expertise of the TGA to ensure Australians have access to safe, effective, and high quality medicines.

“There is compelling evidence to support the decision to make codeine prescription only. Deaths and illness from codeine use have increased in Australia.

“A 2016 survey showed that 75 per cent of recent painkiller or opioid misusers reported misusing an over the counter codeine product in the previous 12 months. Tragically, the survey showed these products were even more likely to be misused by teenagers.

“Under the new arrangements, patients who have short-term pain will still have access to alternative over-the-counter painkillers, which are more effective than low-dose codeine, but without codeine-associated health risks.

“It is better for patients with chronic pain to manage it with doctors’ advice on appropriate medicines and non-medicine treatments. Self-treating long-term with codeine is dangerous.”

Dr Gannon said the AMA will actively support the TGA codeine decision, and will intensify its efforts to work with all governments to respect and uphold the evidence-based rulings of the highly-respected independent regulator, the TGA.

“We will be urging the Pharmacy Guild and others groups who seek to undermine the TGA to reconsider their actions and put the health of Australians first,” Dr Gannon said.

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