

Media Release

Codeine scheduling changes are about patient safety not commercial interests

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Experts from a number of key health groups are urging state and territory governments to support Australia's medicine regulator, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), in its decision to make codeine-based medications available only with a prescription from February 2018.

President of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) Dr Bastian Seidel urged the states and territories to listen to the advice of health professionals and consumer groups and put the health and safety of patients in front of commercial interests.

"With more than one million Australians taking codeine based medications every year, codeine addiction has become a serious problem for our community," Dr Seidel said.

"The consumption of these medications is currently running out of control with over 16 million items being sold over the counter in pharmacies every year.

"Australian GPs are seeing the harmful effect these medications can have on our community, which is why the RACGP strongly endorsed the TGA's decision to reschedule over the counter codeine based medications."

Addiction specialist and the Royal Australasian College of Physicians' President of the Chapter of Addiction Medicine, Professor Adrian Reynolds, said patients with chronic pain should talk to their doctor.

"We strongly support a nationally integrated and coordinated real-time monitoring and reporting system, especially if it includes codeine and other prescribed medications of concern.

"However, we don't support the assumption that a reporting and monitoring system on its own, is going to identify and help people who are misusing these products. The health community needs to know what to do with this information.

"If we accept these products are at risk of abuse and should be monitored, then we should want patients to be assessed by their doctor before they are sold these products.

"We encourage political parties and the health community to work together and support the TGA's scheduling changes for codeine."

PainAustralia CEO Carol Bennett said, "Chronic pain is a major health issue in Australia - we need to do much better than offering medications that are often both ineffective and potentially harmful in responding to chronic pain. Providing appropriate pain management should be a much higher priority, particularly in rural locations where reliance on opioids is a significant issue.

"PainAustralia supports a co-ordinated, whole of sector strategy to address the issue of access to optimal pain management, including public and clinical education programs, linkages between rural health care clinicians via Telehealth with specialist city based services."

The TGA's decision is consistent with what has happened in most of Europe, the United Arab Emirates and Japan where these medicines can only be sold with a prescription. Canada is also heading in a direction of requiring a prescription for products containing codeine.

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About the RACGP

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) was established in 1958 and is Australia's peak general practice representative organisation.

The RACGP has more than 35,000 members working in or towards a career in general practice across metropolitan, regional and rural areas of the country. Nine in every 10 GPs are with the RACGP. More than 134 million general practice consultations take place annually in Australia.

Visit www.racgp.org.au. To unsubscribe from RACGP media releases, [click here](#).

About The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP):

The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 25,000 physicians and trainee physicians across Australia and New Zealand. The College represents a broad range of medical specialties including general medicine, paediatrics and child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology, public health medicine, occupational and environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine, geriatric medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients. The College offers 60 training pathways. These lead to the award of one of seven qualifications that align with 45 specialist titles recognised by the Medical Board of Australia or allow for registration in nine vocational scopes with the Medical Council of New Zealand.

Painaustralia

As the peak national body, Painaustralia brings together consumers, medical specialists, pharmacists, academics, carers, pharmaceutical companies, allied health professionals and others with an interest in pain. Painaustralia brings all the key players together and provides one central point for balanced information and policies.

The organisation was born of the National Pain Strategy and our primary mission is to improve the quality of life for people with pain and their families and minimise the burden of pain on individuals and the community. Effectively tackling pain – a complex physical, psychological and environmental condition – is in the interest of every Australian.