

MEDIA RELEASE

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Message number one: Chronic pain and codeine are not a good mix

Painaustralia welcomes today's announcement by Minister for Health Greg Hunt that one million dollars of new funding will be provided to ensure consumers are better informed about codeine and chronic pain.

Chair of Painaustralia Robert Regan, said: **"The new one-million-dollar funding package Minister Hunt has announced today will promote a long overdue conversation in Australia about the safest and most effective options for pain relief; the roles of doctors, pharmacists, specialists and allied health providers; and the limitations of opioids as a chronic pain treatment.**

"Given pharmacies will not be able to provide over-the-counter codeine from the 1st of February next year, this is a very timely announcement."

Painaustralia CEO Carol Bennett said: **"We know that reliance on codeine and other opioid based drugs for treatment of chronic pain is not effective. We also know these drugs are associated with significant unwanted side effects, risk of overuse, dependence and addiction. The community need to be more aware about the dangers of codeine use, and why it is ineffective for chronic pain management.**

In recent years, opioids have become the first line treatment for chronic pain, leaving many Australians relying on these drugs to manage their pain. People in pain need better information and access to long term effective treatments.

We are pleased that our key health colleagues including the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine, the Rural Doctors Association of Australia, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, the Australian Medical Association and the National Rural Health Alliance will all be given an opportunity to provide accurate information to the community about the use and misuse of codeine as part of the transition to prescription only codeine."

Chronic or persistent pain which occurs on a daily or recurring basis, is a common condition affecting up to one in five Australians and one in three older Australians. Chronic pain impacts on every aspect of a person's life; work, relationships, mental health and well-being. It is estimated chronic pain costs Australia more than \$34 billion per year and is the leading cause of forced early retirement in people of working age. Chronic pain places a heavy burden on our economy, individuals and families.

While in most cases chronic pain cannot be cured, a multidisciplinary approach is the most effective way to reduce disability, improve function and restore quality of life. Early access to effective treatment and support can facilitate return-to-work rather than leading to a lifetime of disability.

Ms Bennett says it's time Australians know the facts: **"Many people believe opioids are the only option in treating pain. They are not aware of the alternatives. If only a fraction of people experiencing chronic pain become better informed and receive better treatment as a consequence of this new funding to support increased awareness, it will have a significant impact on the health and well-being of thousands of Australians, their families, workplaces and communities."**

Media contact: Linda Baracioli 0404 931 031

Website: www.painaustralia.org.au