

MEDIA RELEASE

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Calls for better pain treatment options as codeine restrictions take effect

Advocates for people living with chronic pain have welcomed the restricted access to codeine tablets, which comes into effect today.

The opioid – previously available over the counter at pharmacies – will now require a prescription in Australia, bringing us into line with 25 other countries.

Peak body Painaustralia is campaigning for safer and more effective pain management options for Australians to replace over-the-counter codeine.

Painaustralia chief executive Carol Bennett says that while the use of over-the-counter codeine is largely ineffective for chronic pain, better pain management options need to be more readily available.

“We welcome the fact that codeine will be prescription-only from today,” Ms Bennett said.

“We know that codeine has proven to be ineffective in treating many chronic pain conditions and can also be addictive and harmful.”

Research shows that low-dose codeine isn’t any more effective than over-the-counter tablets like paracetamol and ibuprofen for pain relief.

“In fact in some cases, serious conditions like endometriosis go undiagnosed for many years because codeine use is masking the condition,” Ms Bennett said.

“If someone has ongoing pain the best way to manage it is with a combination of strategies that suit the individual’s personal situation,” Ms Bennett said.

“Physiotherapy, daily exercise, behavioural changes, and rethinking pain with the help of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy are among the best pain management strategies.

“The changes to codeine prescription won’t stop people who really need codeine from accessing their medication through a proper diagnosis and prescription from a doctor.

“However, we’re encouraging everyone to look into the best pain management for their situation – often it isn’t just a tablet.

“It’s important that people living with chronic pain are given all the options and are supported by their clinicians to be able to access the treatment that’s most appropriate for them.”

Many key health, medical and consumer groups support the upscheduling of codeine including: the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia, Rural Doctors Association of Australia, Consumers Health Forum of Australia, Australian Pain Society, ScriptWise and the Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists.

Painaustralia is raising awareness about the options for safe and effective pain relief at the website www.realrelief.org.au

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