



## Leader of the Opposition

Dear Pharmacist

Labor greatly values the vital role played by community pharmacists, who are often the first port of call for Australians in need of health advice, and essential medicines when they are unwell.

Labor has played an important role in Community Pharmacy Agreements over the past three decades, and will continue this important partnership on our return to Government. A Shorten Labor Government will honour the terms of the Sixth Agreement, which commenced in 2015 and will apply through to June 2020.

Labor has long supported the Pharmacy Location Rules and voted for their renewal in 2015. We also support the current system of community pharmacy, including pharmacy ownership by pharmacists (under State and Territory law), as the best means to achieve a well-distributed network of pharmacies providing professional advice and support.

In relation to the current Sixth Community Pharmacy Agreement, we note the ongoing review of pharmacy remuneration and regulation which commenced in late 2015 pursuant to the Agreement. We will be interested to see the findings of the Pharmacy Remuneration and Regulation Review Panel, but this will be just one consideration in the negotiation of the next Agreement. A Shorten Labor Government would lead early and inclusive negotiations towards the Seventh Community Pharmacy Agreement.

We also note that it is vital that funding directed to pharmacy trial programs and professional pharmacy services in the Sixth Agreement is mobilised as soon as possible to ensure patients get the benefit intended from this funding.

A Shorten Labor Government will also improve the Remote Area Aboriginal Health Services (RAAHS) Program to remunerate pharmacies when they dispense Section 100 RAAHS medicines at the normal level of dispensing remuneration (when not a bulk supply), funded from within the existing funding envelope of the Sixth Community Pharmacy Agreement. The ongoing inequity for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients must be resolved as soon as possible.

Labor firmly believes that medicines must remain affordable and accessible for all Australians. After all, Labor created the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), which along with Medicare is a key pillar of Australia's universal health system that Labor will always protect. A Shorten Labor Government will reverse the Turnbull Liberals' plans to increase PBS co-payments by \$5 for general patients and 80 cents for concessional patients, and to increase the PBS safety net thresholds.

This will protect access in particular for the most vulnerable – the poor, elderly and sick – who would be worst hit by the Liberals' plans to cut the PBS and may defer filling scripts for the medicines they need. As the Guild would agree, this is not good for patients or our health system.

There is considerable evidence that countries with more accessible primary care achieve better health outcomes, at lower cost, and with greater equity, than do countries with a higher focus on acute care. Detecting illness earlier, and treating it earlier, improves patient outcomes and avoids the need for more

expensive treatments. That is why a Shorten Labor Government will have a strong focus on primary health care and preventive health measures. Community Pharmacy is obviously an important part of this and we would look forward to working with the Guild on reform and innovation in this area.

Labor agrees with the Guild that our health system needs to be more co-ordinated and co-operative. Of course, an effective eHealth record is essential to this. A Shorten Labor Government will continue to build the eHealth record system while ensuring appropriate privacy and security protocols.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Shorten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "B".

Bill Shorten MP  
Leader of the Opposition

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Catherine King". The signature is cursive and elegant, with a large initial "C".

Catherine King MP  
Shadow Minister for Health