



Leader of the Opposition

Mr George Tambassis
National President
The Pharmacy Guild of Australia
Level 2, Pharmacy Guild House
15 National Circuit
Barton ACT 2600

Dear George

Thank you for the opportunity to reiterate Labor's strong support for community pharmacy ahead of the next federal election.

As you know from our productive discussions over the last two terms, Labor values the important role that pharmacists play in the supply of medicines and the health of all Australians. This is reflected in our updated National Platform – our most important policy document – which now recognises that “the National Medicines Policy and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme are underpinned by the community pharmacy network and pharmacists, who are medicines experts”.

That's why Labor has long supported the current system of community pharmacy – including the Location Rules, which Labor voted to make permanent in 2018.

It's also why we are proud to have a pharmacist in our parliamentary Caucus. Labor will continue to draw on the experience and expertise of the Member for Dobell, Emma McBride, as we consider issues affecting your sector.

Foremost among those issues is the upcoming expiry of the 6th Community Pharmacy Agreement in June 2020. A Shorten Labor Government will honour the 6CPA and lead early and inclusive negotiations towards the next agreement. And just as importantly, we will honour the agreement we make. As the Guild has said of its disputes with the current Government, that is a matter of trust.

One challenge the next agreement will need to consider is the affordability of medicines. Official Government data shows that one in 14 people delays or avoids filling scripts due to cost – meaning that hundreds of thousands of Australians don't visit pharmacies or take needed medicines.

Labor was alarmed by the current Government's proposal to make this worse by increasing PBS co-payments by up to \$5 – even for pensioners. We also understand the view that the optional \$1 discount, which the current Government introduced in 2016, has not improved the affordability of medicines for most Australians.

A Labor Government will consider how to improve the affordability of medicines in the context of the next agreement. Labor will also work with you to address other barriers to access, such as the difficulty of attracting and retaining pharmacists in some parts of Australia.

The next agreement will also need to consider the role of pharmacists and community pharmacies in primary health care reform. Labor shares the Guild's belief that pharmacists should work to their full scope of practice, without fragmenting care or duplicating services.

Again, this belief is reflected in our National Platform, which recognises that "primary care innovation should include better utilisation of [the pharmacy] infrastructure and workforce", and commits a Labor Government to "encouraging opportunities and funding systems [for] GPs, community pharmacies and other primary care providers to collaborate".

We have already announced that a Shorten Labor Government will establish a permanent Australian Health Reform Commission, and that one of its first priorities will be primary care reform. We look forward to working with you on this important task.

Finally, we note that states and territories play an important role in the regulation of medicines in Australia. This is a feature of our federation and provides opportunities for state-based innovation and local policy responses.

However, Labor also understands that federalism can lead to a patchwork of laws and inconsistencies for patients and pharmacists. A Shorten Labor Government will therefore ask the COAG Health Council to consider whether it is possible and desirable to harmonise state laws and programs on the supply of medicines and vaccines, Opioid Dependence Treatment and continuity of supply after natural disasters.

Thank you again for the opportunity to reiterate our support for Australia's 5,700 community pharmacies. We have been grateful for our close relationship with pharmacists and the Guild in Opposition, and hope to continue that relationship as Prime Minister and Health Minister after the next election.

Yours sincerely



Bill Shorten
Leader of the Opposition
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders



Catherine King
Shadow Minister for Health and Medicare

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