



**MEDIA RELEASE  
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## **NPS MedicineWise calls for review of quality use of medicines funding decision**

NPS MedicineWise is calling for a review of the decision, announced in the Federal Budget, to change the way Quality Use of Medicines (QUM) initiatives are led and funded in Australia.

NPS MedicineWise was established in 1998 as an independent organisation to promote the quality use of medicines, supporting Australians to make safe and wise decisions about medicines and other health technologies. For 24 years, its activities have been primarily funded by the Commonwealth Government as a critical implementation arm for the National Medicines Policy.

From 1 January 2023, NPS MedicineWise will no longer receive uncontested funding from the Department of Health to deliver QUM functions. The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC) will take on core QUM 'stewardship' functions while education programs for health professionals and consumers will move to contestable funding.

Since its establishment, NPS MedicineWise has delivered a comprehensive set of medicines-related education programs and resources that have been shown to significantly improve health outcomes for Australians, such as reducing cancers, strokes, other major cardiovascular events and harm from opioid medicines. At the same time the organisation has delivered a net return on investment of more than 2:1 to the Government through over \$1.1 billion in direct savings for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and Medicare Benefits Scheme (MBS).

"Through 24 years of investment, NPS MedicineWise has built a unique set of expertise, assets and networks that is dedicated to supporting quality use of medicines and medicines safety, Australia's 10<sup>th</sup> National Health Priority Area," says Katherine Burchfield, CEO of NPS MedicineWise.

"We have a central focus on quality use of medicines, and are a trusted, 'go to' resource and independent voice that is highly valued by consumers and frontline health professionals, particularly GPs. Our value and impact comes from our independence from any particular health professional discipline, and government. Benefits to consumers are central to our work and we achieve this using our expertise in behaviour change, bringing education, information and insights together to support evidence-based decision making across all health professional groups and health conditions".

The changes come at a time when the need for a safe and wise use of medicines is increasing in importance, and while the guiding policy, the National Medicines Policy, is under review. The Royal Commissions into the aged and disability sectors have identified significant quality use of medicines issues, and stakeholders have been calling for a stronger focus on QUM, and continuation of independent QUM stewardship. Although the Government has announced an increase in funding for quality use of medicines in 2022-23, much of this is to support the transition, and it is not clear whether current levels of investment will be maintained in future years.

Functions that are expected to transfer from NPS MedicineWise to the ACSQHC include national stewardship and indicators, the MedicineInsight dataset, the MedicineWise consumer apps and the NPS MedicineWise website and content.

"While there is no doubt that the ACSQHC has a key role to play in quality use of medicines, and has strong capabilities and networks, it performs a different role and function in the health system to that of NPS

MedicineWise. The two organisations should work together, using their different strengths and levers, to enact change,” says Katherine Burchfield.

Reducing duplication and introducing an element of contestable funding in delivery of programs are excellent goals. However, when taken all together, the changes that have been announced risk fragmentation and dilution of effort at a time when Australians most need a strong, integrated approach around quality use of medicines.

A 2019 Government-led Review of the organisation found almost universal acknowledgement that NPS MedicineWise’s activities should continue to be supported by the Commonwealth.

“It is not clear why this decision was made at this time, in this way, without consultation, given its importance to so many people and to the wider sector.”

NPS MedicineWise has other funding sources and will look to continue its operations beyond 31 December 2022. However, it will not have the remit or funding to continue in its current form.

Katherine Burchfield says, “Having listened to voices from across the health and aged care sectors, we are calling for a review of the Federal budget decision, with in-depth consultation before these changes are implemented”