

NPS MedicineWise to cease operations after 24 years

After 24 years championing the quality use of medicines in Australia, the NPS MedicineWise Board has made the difficult decision to cease the company's operations at the end of 2022.

This follows the decision by the Federal Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Mark Butler, to proceed with the redesign of the Quality Use of Therapeutics, Diagnostics and Pathology (QUTDP) Program, as announced in the March 2022 Federal Budget. The Minister's decision follows a "rapid review" of the Budget measure by Deloitte Access Economics, in line with a pre-election commitment from the Labor Party after strong advocacy from NPS MedicineWise and the health community.

The implications of this decision are significant for the quality use of medicines in Australia and for NPS MedicineWise. From 1 January 2023, NPS MedicineWise will no longer receive Federal Government funding to deliver Quality Use of Medicines activities, and existing functions will transfer either to the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) or to new contestable funding arrangements.

Since its inception in 1998, NPS MedicineWise has provided national leadership, education and resources on the quality use of medicines and medicines safety in Australia, working closely with health professionals, consumers and the broader health sector. NPS MedicineWise's programs and resources reach all GPs and one-third of residential aged care facilities across Australia, and have made significant and demonstrable improvements to the health of Australians - including through reducing medicines harm, cancers, strokes and other major cardiovascular events. Recent programs on heart failure, mental health and young people, anticholinergics and falls in older people and chronic kidney disease are amongst the most valued and impactful programs that NPS MedicineWise has delivered.

At the same time the organisation has delivered a net return on investment of more than 2:1 to the Federal Government through delivering over \$1.1 billion in direct savings for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and Medicare Benefits Scheme (MBS).

Minister Butler's decision to proceed with the redesign has catastrophic implications for NPS MedicineWise's role and funding, and has left the Board with no alternative but to wind up the company at 31 December 2022.

"NPS MedicineWise does not agree with the decision to proceed with the redesign. We believe it will prove to be a poor decision, and will make the safe and wise use of medicines in Australia much harder to achieve," says Dr Andrew Knight, Chair of the NPS MedicineWise Board.

"However, we accept that this is the Minister's decision and, in response, have made the difficult decision to wind up the company as and when our funding ceases on 31 December 2022."

"NPS MedicineWise has made an outstanding contribution to the quality use of medicines over its 24 years and has improved the lives of many Australians. We will leave behind an incredible legacy that we will look to celebrate with our staff and the health community and preserve for the future," he says.

In response to the decision, Katherine Burchfield, CEO of NPS MedicineWise, says:

"This is an extremely sad and challenging time for our organisation, and the end of an era for many. Over the years, NPS MedicineWise has become a valued "go to" resource for health professionals and consumers in the quality use of medicines, and has built up a unique set of expertise, assets and networks. It is hard not to see this decision as a backwards step".

Between now and the end of December, NPS MedicineWise's focus will be on the responsible transfer of its functions, working closely with the Commission and the Department of Health and Aged Care, and ensuring the best outcome for the organisation's 170 staff.

"We live in a new post-pandemic world with exciting innovations in medicines and healthcare, and increasing tensions between access, affordability and safety. The need for a strong national focus on the quality use of medicines is more critical than ever. We have an exceptional team at NPS MedicineWise delivering exceptional programs. Our priority from here is to support our people and ensure the smooth and effective transfer of our functions and capability so that, wherever possible, they are retained for the continued benefit of the health sector," says Ms Burchfield.

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