



PRESCRIBING PBS MEDICINES

WHAT PRESCRIBERS NEED TO KNOW

NOVEMBER 2022*



This factsheet provides a summary of important information to assist prescribers to correctly prescribe under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

Pharmaceutical benefits or PBS medicines can only be prescribed by doctors, dentists, optometrists, midwives and nurse practitioners¹ who are issued with a unique prescriber number and are approved to prescribe PBS medicines under the *National Health Act 1953* (the Act).

A prescriber can write prescriptions for dispensing and supply by pharmacists in the following two ways:

- Standard prescription paper forms
- Electronic prescriptions

Electronic prescriptions are the preferred option for telehealth consultations. It is recommended prescribers ask their patients if they are happy to receive an electronic prescription token via SMS or email.

For a prescription to be considered a PBS prescription, it must fulfil all of the legal requirements as outlined in the Act and the *National Health (Pharmaceutical Benefits) Regulations 2017*. A pharmacy is unable to dispense or supply the item under the PBS to your patient where these requirements are not met.

Image based prescriptions

During the COVID 19 pandemic, an interim arrangement was made allowing image-based prescribing. This provided an emergency option for exceptional circumstances where electronic prescribing or other prescribing options, such as emergency supply arrangements could not be used, particularly where communities continue to be affected by state-wide COVID-19 lockdowns arrangements. These provisions came to an end on 31 March 2022, except with hospitals where image-based prescribing will apply to the supply of pharmaceutical benefits for patients treated in hospitals until 31 March 2023.

What to do in urgent cases

Under Regulation 48 of the *National Health (Pharmaceutical Benefits) Regulations 2017* (and where State/Territory law allows),

pharmacists are able to supply a PBS medicine without a prescription in the case of urgency if;

- (a) a PBS prescriber advises the pharmacist of the details of the prescription; or
- (b) a PBS prescriber has given the pharmacist a copy of the prescription.

This also applies to 'Authority required' authority PBS prescriptions only if prior approval has been given by Services Australia or Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA). The follow-up written or electronic PBS prescription must include the approval number provided over the phone by Services Australia or DVA.

In the event of an urgent supply the prescriber must then forward and ensure the written (including the duplicate) or electronic PBS prescription to the pharmacist is received no later than seven days after the day on which the benefit was supplied.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

- ✓ The PBS prescription must be for the treatment of the person named on the PBS prescription. A PBS prescription may only be written for the treatment of one person.
- ✓ Up to three PBS medicines may be included on a single PBS prescription form except for Authority required, Authority required (STREAMLINED) items and optometrist items. These items must be written on individual forms.²
- ✓ If an item is restricted (as listed in the Schedule of Pharmaceutical Benefits www.pbs.gov.au), and the use for the patient is different from the use specified in the restriction, it cannot be prescribed as a PBS medicine. The prescriber should write the prescription as a non-PBS or private prescription. If a standard PBS prescription form is used for this purpose the 'PBS/RPBS'³ text must be clearly struck out. It should also be endorsed 'non-PBS'.
- ✓ Prescribers are required to include the active ingredient name(s) of the prescribed medicine on all PBS and RPBS prescriptions. Prescribers should also include the brand name on prescriptions wherever clinically necessary for their patient, and where the medicine is on the List of Medicines for Brand Consideration (LMBC). Where a brand name is included on prescriptions, the active ingredient must appear first. Prescribers also retain the ability to disallow brand substitution. Medicinal items on the List of Excluded Medicinal Items (LEMI) are prescribed by brand name only.
- ✓ Prescribers must heed State/Territory laws when prescribing drugs listed as narcotic, specified or restricted in the poisons legislation of the particular State or Territory. Legislative requirements in some States/Territories are such that prescribers may be required to prescribe a drug of addiction on a separate PBS prescription. Prescribers must ensure that prescriptions written under the PBS fall within the limits of the prescribing approval granted to the person under State or Territory requirements. It is the prescriber's responsibility to ensure that PBS prescriptions comply with all aspects of his/her prescriber approval.

WHAT YOU SHOULDN'T DO

- ✗ A prescriber cannot write more than one PBS prescription (whether standard paper or electronic) for the same PBS medicine for the same person on the same day.
- ✗ PBS and non-PBS medicines should not be listed together on the one PBS prescription form.
- ✗ If an item has a particular manner of administration it may not, as a PBS medicine, be administered in any other way, e.g., an ophthalmic preparation may not be prescribed for topical use.
- ✗ Prescribers should not re-issue a PBS prescription by re-printing from the patient history. Each time a PBS prescription is issued, the current date must be reflected as forward or back dating is not permitted.
- ✗ A PBS prescriber cannot prescribe a narcotic drug for themselves.⁴

[1] There are separate arrangements for PBS prescriptions in certain public hospitals which will not be covered in this factsheet. Refer to www.pbs.gov.au for more information.

[2] Exceptions apply to hospital prescriptions.

[3] Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS).

[4] Please refer to your State/Territory laws.

Further information

For more information on electronic prescriptions please scan here:



For more information on rules for PBS prescribing please scan here:



For more information on Active Ingredient Prescribing please scan here:

