



02 Prescribing PBS Medications

July 2024

This information sheet provides an overview of the operation of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and matters prescribers should have regard to when writing scripts for patients.

Overview

The PBS¹ provides timely, reliable and affordable access to necessary medicines to all Australians. The PBS is part of the Australian Government's broader National Medicines Policy to promote optimal health outcomes and economic objectives for the Australian community.

The PBS Schedule² is an online list of medicines that can be prescribed to eligible patients at government subsidised prices. The scheme is administered by Services Australia under the provisions of the *National Health Act 1953*³ and the *National Health (Pharmaceutical Benefits) Regulations 2017*⁴.

The Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS) is a further list of medicines available to veterans and war widows/widowers that are subsidised by the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA).

The Australian government sets a maximum patient contribution for PBS and RPBS medications with a lower rate applicable for concession card holders. A Safety Net⁵ applies to reduce or remove the co-payment altogether once the family unit has reached a concessional or general threshold.

Most listed medicines are dispensed through a community pharmacy and used by patients at home.

1. Eligibility

People residing in Australia who are eligible for Medicare Benefits are able to access the PBS. Patients can prove their eligibility with a Medicare card, a reciprocal Medicare card or a passport from a country which Australia has a reciprocal healthcare agreement.

Veterans, their dependent children and war widows/widowers will hold a gold, white or orange DVA Health Card.

¹ Department of Health and Aged Care www.pbs.gov.au/pbs/home

² www.pbs.gov.au/browse/medicine-listing

³ www.legislation.gov.au/C1953A00095/latest/text

⁴ www.legislation.gov.au/F2017L00313/latest/text

⁵ www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/pbs-safety-net-thresholds?context=22016

2. Prescribers

A practitioner with a Medicare provider number may apply to Services Australia for a single unique 7-digit prescriber number, which is not location specific. Additional prescriber numbers may be needed where a practitioner provides services in multiple health professions.

Midwives and Nurse Practitioners with Medicare Provider numbers can also apply for a prescriber number (for a limited range of items).

Prescribers must ensure medicines are prescribed in accordance with the Schedule, which may detail criteria the patient must satisfy to be eligible to obtain the subsidised medication.

- ‘Restricted’ medicines are only to be prescribed through the PBS if the prescriber is satisfied the patient’s clinical condition matches the therapeutic uses listed in the Schedule.
- ‘Authority required’ restricted medicines require approval from Services Australia or DVA and must include the authority code (or streamlined code) included on the prescription.
- In addition to the medications available under usual PBS arrangements, a limited number of specialised drugs are available as pharmaceutical benefits but are distributed under alternative arrangements of supply under section 100 of the *National Health Act 1953*⁶.
- The Schedule includes items that may be prescribed by Midwives and Nurse Practitioners, including palliative care medications.
- Medications that require a patient to pay a premium or special patient contribution are indicated in the Schedule, as are brand medicines that may be substituted with a bioequivalent alternative that can reduce a patient’s out of pocket cost.
- A patient cannot receive a PBS/RPBS prescription for the same item written on the same day.

Services Australian maintains e-learning, FAQ and other resources for health practitioners online^{7, 8}.

When writing a prescription:

- Limit the number of PBS medicines per prescription to a maximum of three.
- Use a separate prescription for each ‘authority required’ medicine.
- List non-PBS items or off-label use medications on a separate prescription.
- Abide by State laws when prescribing medicines which are listed as narcotic, specified or restricted in the *Medicines and Poisons (Medicines) Regulation 2021*⁹

3. Scheme integrity

Prescribers have a responsibility to ensure the integrity of the PBS. Services Australia views fraud as dishonestly obtaining a benefit by deception, such as writing a script where the patient does not meet the eligibility criteria or providing false information to obtain an authority approval.

⁶ www.pbs.gov.au/browse/section100

⁷ <https://hpe.servicesaustralia.gov.au/pharmaceutical-benefits-scheme.html>

⁸ www.pbs.gov.au/info/general/faq

⁹ www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/sl-2021-0140