

Make antivirals available to more patients – and help close down the COVID surge

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Consumers Health Forum supports the call from the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) and others to expand the access to anti-virals beyond the current restrictions and restore funding for home delivery of medicines.

CHF CEO, Leanne Wells welcomed Minister Butler's comments this week that he desires more people to be eligible for anti-viral treatments, and his request that the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee consider expanding eligibility.

"As we face the winter COVID surge, the risk to the community is high and we need to act with urgency to reduce COVID infections and hospitalisations," said Ms Wells.

"In the face of rising infections from COVID, we urge the government to use the anti-viral medication supply to help reduce severe COVID symptoms and hospitalisations," said Ms Wells.

"The current triage of high risk from COVID is too restrictive, and we hope that the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) will evaluate the risks and benefits of expanding access to more people," said Ms Wells.

"The current arrangement is that people who do not meet the current criteria, but can afford to, are paying for the antivirals as a non-PBS script item. This is clearly inequitable, these medications are not cheap," said Ms Wells.

"We do not want COVID treatment arrangements to be based on means not need."

As Minister Butler has said in last night's interview, Australia has a stockpile of antivirals but is also faced with the prospect of growing hospitalisations, as cases surge.

"Relaxing the criteria for patients who can access this important medication will help keep more people out of hospital," said Ms Wells.

The call for the Federal Government to restore funding for pharmacies to provide the COVID-19 Home Medicine Service is also strongly endorsed by CHF.

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“It is imperative that people who have COVID or COVID symptoms, isolating because they have COVID, or isolating to protect themselves from being exposed to life threatening viruses, can access their vital medicines,” said Ms Wells.

The window of opportunity for effective use of anti-virals is very short, CHF welcomes the proposed awareness campaign and encourages the government to include information for consumers.

“People who have higher risk of severe disease should be encouraged to have a plan in place with their doctor and their pharmacist,” said Ms Well.

“Timely access to antivirals is critical to reduce the severity of COVID-19 infection and limiting complications,” said Ms Wells.

“We cannot sit and wait for infections and hospitalisations to rise further – governments must act now,” said Ms Wells.

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