



AUSTRALIAN SELF-MEDICATION INDUSTRY
BETTER HEALTH THROUGH RESPONSIBLE SELF-CARE

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MEDIA RELEASE

SELF CARE COULD SAVE ON HEALTH BUDGETS AND IMPROVE PERSONAL HEALTH

Australia's health budget could see major savings and doctors' workload could be reduced if Australians were encouraged to take greater control over their health, a leading health expert told the Australian Self-Medication Industry Conference in Sydney today.

The ASMI Conference, *Self-Care, The Consumer & Commercial Reality*, heard speakers from the Commonwealth Government, the health industry, pharmaceutical companies, as well as health economists on the future of self-care and its impact on individuals and health budgets.

Health economist, Paul Gross, Director of Health Group Strategies said that inefficiencies in Australia's health system meant that up to 15% of the total annual health expenditure of about \$85 billion did not contribute to good health and quality of life.

He said the current system created incentives for people to use the health system for the simplest of ailments with up to 40% of GP visits unnecessary.

Addressing Australia's obesity crisis, Mr Gross said providing economic incentives to encourage people to change unhealthy lifestyles was more likely to succeed than ill-conceived steps to regulate advertising of junk food.

"If we do not have the information and confidence to embrace some types of self-care, we will make growing demands on the health system as we age.

He said recent studies in Europe showed that switching just 5% to 10% of prescription medicines to over-the-counter (OTC) status reduced the use of doctors and their cost, and cut total payments from government.

Other speakers at the conference included the Minister for Health & Ageing, Tony Abbott, who provided the keynote address, and the Parliamentary Secretary for Health & Ageing, Christopher Pyne.

The Executive Director of ASMI, Juliet Seifert said the conference provided a wide range of industry stakeholders the chance to hear how a self-care approach could reshape Australia's health system.

“Unless individuals can be encouraged to take further steps to look after their health, government health budgets and resources will come under extraordinary pressure.

“A self care, or preventative focus, has considerable capacity to change individual behaviour and help to achieve a more balanced health budget, while targeting the highest priority health issues,” Ms Seifert said.

Self-care involves a fundamental shift from cure to prevention as part of a focus on holistic health. This includes promotion of a healthy lifestyle including good diet and exercise, as well as use of self-medication to treat minor ailments or some chronic conditions.

The increased use of over-the-counter and complementary medicines shows that many Australian are already knowledgeable and willing to treat everyday ailments rather than going to the doctor for minor self-limiting conditions.

The conference heard about the future of self-care from the perspective of Generation Y, as well as from the standpoint of older Australians.

Peter Sheahan, a ‘Gen Y’ expert said understanding this group meant accepting the need for instant gratification in many of the products and brands they consumed including health services.

David Chalke from AustraliaSCAN said Australians had a healthy scepticism about the future capacity of the health system to address their needs, and a realisation that they would need to take greater personal control of their health and lifestyle.

CSIRO Manager and co-author of the *CSIRO Total Well-Being Diet*, Peter Clifton, addressed the emerging functional foods debate and the way Australians would react to foods designed to address conditions such as obesity, cholesterol and heart disease.

Professor Basil Roufogalis from the Herbal Medicines Research and Education Centre at the University of Sydney provided a case study into the research and development of therapeutic medicines to treat cardiovascular disease, which were derived from traditional medicines used in China and Japan.

About ASMI

ASMI (Australian Self-Medication Industry) is the peak industry body for the Australian self care industry representing consumer healthcare products including over-the-counter medicines and complementary medicines. ASMI’s mission is to promote better health through responsible self-care. This means ensuring that safe and effective self-care products are readily available to all Australians at a reasonable cost. ASMI works to encourage responsible use by consumers and an increasing role for cost-effective self-medication products as part of the broad national health strategy. A full list of ASMI member organisations is attached. Further information is available at www.asmi.com.au

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