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## MEDIA RELEASE

### **'Minor ailments' strategy needed to ease GP waiting lists and generate savings to health budget, says ASMI budget submission**

The Australian Self-Medication Industry (ASMI), the industry body representing non-prescription consumer healthcare products, today proposed measures to generate long term savings to health budgets by redirecting some minor ailments away from overstretched GPs.

In its budget submission released today, ASMI proposes a health education and awareness program to highlight the choices available to consumers with minor ailments such as using the pharmacist as a first point of contact.

The Executive Director of the Australian Self-Medication, Juliet Seifert said, "It's a question of whether in a 21<sup>st</sup> century health system, people need to physically visit an overburdened GP for such things as coughs colds and sore throats. These changes would allow doctors to apply their skills and training to best use in treating more serious conditions as well as to longer term preventative health," Ms Seifert said.

The proposal has been supported by one of Australia's leading health experts, Dr Tony Hobbs, a NSW-based GP and former Chair of the External Reference Group for the National Primary Health Care Strategy.

"We need a primary health care system that better encourages and supports people to look after themselves. This will require more resources committed to improve health literacy levels and to support people with chronic illnesses to self-manage their conditions more effectively.

"Important enablers of this agenda will be a primary healthcare system that allows more effective use of interactions with community pharmacy, general practice and allied health providers with timely, secure sharing of information between providers."

The scale of minor ailments was highlighted in the December 2009 'Bettering the Evaluating and Care of Health' (BEACH) report, a joint study into general practice by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and the University of Sydney. It showed that of the 30 most common 'Reasons for Encounter' with a GP, a total of 19 or 63 per cent comprised symptoms such as cough, throat and back complaints, and rash.

A separate study, commissioned by ASMI and conducted in 2008 by international health industry consultants, IMS, found that 15% of all GP consultations involve the treatment of

minor ailments, and 7% involve the treatment of minor ailments alone. When projected nationally it equates to a total of 25 million GP consultations annually, or approximately 96,000 consultations per day. Approximately 59% of minor ailments resulted in a prescription, suggesting almost 15 million prescriptions being provided for minor ailments.

Building on that study, health economist, David Gadiel, has estimated that the top 10 minor ailments alone take up as much as 7% of Australia's GP workforce - the full time equivalent of up to 1,000 GPs. He also estimates some \$260 million in 'waste and resource misallocation' as a result of Medicare benefits associated with GP treatment of minor ailments.

ASMI has proposed the development of a program to promote education and awareness about the choices available to consumers before presenting to a GP with a minor ailment. In the initial phase, the program should have a focus on the most prevalent minor ailments, notably upper respiratory tract infections and back pain, ahead of a later stage which could move to other disorders.

The program would focus on measures to improve health literacy to enable people to recognise self-limiting minor ailments and help them to navigate the health system, for instance, by promoting pharmacy as the first port of call for such cases. The program should provide for the development of a 'self care in practice' booklet, website and related collateral to be made available to consumers and healthcare professionals through schools, pharmacies, GPs and practice nurses.

Dr Hobbs said that an important part of empowering people to self-manage their conditions is consideration of better access to medications. "The appropriate down-scheduling of more medications from prescription-only to over the counter availability would facilitate this happening. We should be informed by the developments in other OECD countries in this area," he said.

Ms Seifert said that even if it were possible to achieve the modest target of some 20% of GP consultations for minor ailments shifting to self care, that would translate into some 20,000 fewer GP consultations daily.

To view the ASMI Budget Submission visit: [www.asmi.com.au](http://www.asmi.com.au)

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**About ASMI:** The Australian Self-Medication Industry (ASMI) 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. [www.asmi.com.au](http://www.asmi.com.au)

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