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MEDIA STATEMENT

Caution urged over restrictions on medicines containing codeine

The Australian Self-Medication Industry (ASMI), the industry body representing non-prescription consumer healthcare products, today warned that thousands of Australians could be inconvenienced in the event of new restrictions on over-the-counter analgesics and cough/cold medicines containing codeine.

The National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee (NDPSC) has been examining reports of misuse of analgesics containing codeine and has foreshadowed the possibility of restrictions on access and reduced pack sizes.

The Scientific Director of ASMI, Dr Deon Schoombie, said while no final decision had been taken, the industry was concerned at the prospect of changes that could limit consumers' access to these medicines.

"While there have been isolated reports of abuse, the products have a long history of safe use when used according to label instructions, and the vast majority of consumers use the products appropriately.

"These medicines play an important role in relieving strong pain and addressing the symptoms of cold and flu, and any move to restrict their availability would be an enormous inconvenience to thousands of responsible users," he said.

"It is important that a balance is achieved between the activities of a small minority who may choose to abuse the product, and the thousands of consumers who use it responsibly and safely.

"We need to consider not only the risks, but also the benefits associated with the use of a medicine. We believe there is already a level of regulation appropriate to the product's efficacy and safety profile.

"We do not believe that the measures proposed by the NDPSC will reduce the very low risk of harm among those who abuse or misuse the products," Dr Schoombie said.

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

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