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MEDIA RELEASE

ASMI NATIONAL CONFERENCE HEARS CALLS FOR SELF CARE TO BECOME INTEGRAL TO AUSTRALIA'S HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Australia's national health system faces increasing bottlenecks and sub-standard outcomes unless active steps are taken to empower consumers to take greater responsibility for their self care, the Australian Self-Medication Industry (ASMI) conference was told in Sydney today.

Households face rising costs for healthcare and diminishing quality of life from preventable conditions without steps to actively encourage and promote self care.

A new study released at the conference shows that some 25 million GP consultations each year involve minor ailments, highlighting the scope for a significant burden to be lifted from GPs. (see separate media release).

The findings were released at the ASMI Conference, titled, *Integrating Self Care into the Healthcare System*, at Technology Park, Redfern.

The keynote address was delivered by Senator Jan McLucas, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health & Ageing.

Dr Paul Gross, Director of the Institute of Health Economics and Technology Assessment, said that Australia now needs a national self care alliance to promote the proven tools of self care.

"Nearly 70% of adult Australians lack information to make better health decisions, and unless Medicare and health insurance are restructured to support patients, healthcare expenditures will rise beyond today's average 4.7% share of household budgets, health insurance dropouts will accelerate and the Medicare levy must increase".

Self care involves a fundamental shift from cure to prevention in which the individual is given information and education to take more personal responsibility for preventable risk factors, use appropriate types of care when acute conditions flare, and self-medication to treat minor ailments and some chronic conditions.

The Executive Director of ASMI, Juliet Seifert said: "A self care focus, has considerable capacity to change individual behaviour and help to achieve a sustainable health budget while targeting the highest priority health issues".

"The increased use of over-the-counter and complementary medicines shows that many Australians are already knowledgeable and willing to treat everyday ailments rather than going to the doctor for minor conditions," Ms Seifert said.



BETTER HEALTH THROUGH RESPONSIBLE SELF CARE



Sheila Kelly, from the Proprietary Association of Great Britain said in the UK, self care has been embedded in key parts of the health system and the government has set a target to achieve major reform by 2020.

“The governments plan for doing this is to move much more healthcare out of hospitals, to get the GPs to do a great deal more and people to do more in managing their illnesses and preventing them.

“With only about 11 years to achieve this, two things have to happen - more medicines have to be available without prescription and more people have to be given the tools to treat themselves instead of going to the doctor,” she said.

The conference heard a prediction from international OTC expert, Nicholas Hall, that global economic slowdown will bring opportunities for greater self care.

He said the end of unlimited credit means governments and consumers will need to reprioritise their spending and that the OTC market will benefit from offering “high value, medium cost, low risk” solutions.

He projects that between now and 2017, the OTC market will grow to US\$172 billion as it continues to deregulate. He said there will be a reduction in the barriers to switching from prescription to OTC status and, as a result, there will be at least 10 new OTC mega-brands developed in the next five years, underscoring the growth potential of the self care market.

A panel session looked at the building blocks required for self care in Australia and included Dr Rohan Hammett (Therapeutic Goods Administration), Professor Ron Penny (National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission), Kos Sclavos (Pharmacy Guild of Australia), Kate Carnell (Australian Food and Grocery Council) and Diane Walsh (Consumers Health Forum), moderated by ABC science broadcaster, Robyn Williams.

Katherine Doric, from The Nielsen Company, presented an analysis of global attitudes of consumers in relation to the safety, efficacy and trust factors associated with OTC medicines.

In the case of Australia, some 27% said they always or usually take a medicine as soon as they start to feel unwell; safety was cited as the main consideration in choosing an OTC medicine; the doctor, closely followed by the pharmacist were cited as the leading sources for information on health; and 28% agreed that more medicines should be available without a prescription.

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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