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## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

### **Pharmacist-only category of medicines becoming a consumer backwater**

The Australian Self-Medication Industry (ASMI), the industry body representing non-prescription consumer healthcare products today called for reforms to therapeutic goods regulation to allow advertising for a growing category of consumer medicines.

The current prohibition on consumer advertising of certain medicines in the Pharmacist Only, or Schedule 3 (S3) category is short-changing consumers, and harming manufacturers who are unable to bring products to the notice of consumers who may benefit from them.

“It does not make sense to have a category of medicines that is available to the public, without prescription, but which is not able to be advertised to those who may need them,” said the Executive Director of ASMI, Juliet Seifert.

“If these medicines are sufficiently safe to be allowed to be sold without the need for a prescription, it also makes sense to allow them to be responsibly advertised. “

Currently, therapeutic goods classified as S3 cannot be advertised unless they are included in Appendix H of the Standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Drugs and Poisons (SUSDP).

Because these medicines can't be advertised and must be kept within the dispensary, consumers can often remain completely unaware of their existence. With no mechanism to expose consumers to the brand, many consumers do not find a need to speak to the pharmacist.

The S3 category now contains a range of medicines for conditions that can be safely managed with the intervention of a pharmacist including codeine combination analgesics, proton pump inhibitors, and treatments for eye infections and weight loss.

The situation is also damaging to the industry, with one major pharmaceutical firm required to restructure operations because its S3 product was not able to gain the advertising necessary to reach a broad-based consumer market. If the current restrictions remain, the S3 category without advertising will remain a backwater of little-known products that are largely uneconomic for providers.

The position is counter to that of the U.K. market where all over-the-counter (OTC) products are able to be advertised direct to consumers.

One explanation for the advertising restriction in Australia is that the possibility of inappropriate advertising warrants certain S3 products being placed in a special “non-advertising” category.

However, there are already safeguards over advertising of therapeutic products under the Therapeutic Goods Advertising Code which includes a process of pre-approvals, together with a complaints mechanism in the event of alleged breaches.

The other reason for the ban on advertising of some S3 products is that advertising would lead to inappropriate patterns of use, an assertion which has never been substantiated.

“It’s time that the advertising controls relevant to the Pharmacist Only category were reviewed in light of recent scheduling decisions, and the need for increased consumer awareness about latest treatment options.

“Without knowledge of the alternative treatments available, patients are more likely to have to visit an already overstretched GP for minor ailments, when an effective OTC remedy is available at a pharmacy,” Ms Seifert said.

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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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