

Help with Medicine Costs (PBS Safety Net)

The Australian Government's PBS (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) Safety Net helps to limit the cost of medicines for persons and families who use a large number of prescription medicines in one calendar year. Your pharmacist can help you to keep a record of your medicine costs each year.

Many medicines are very expensive, often costing hundreds or sometimes thousands of dollars per month or course of treatment. The Australian Government subsidizes the cost of prescription medicines through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). This PBS subsidy means Australian residents do not have to pay the full cost of many of their prescribed medicines. The PBS Safety Net provides an extra subsidy for PBS medicines for those who spend over a certain amount on PBS medicines in one calendar year.

The PBS Safety Net

- Each year the government sets the PBS Safety Net threshold for that year – this is the amount that you and your family need to spend on PBS medicines, in that calendar year, in order to qualify for the PBS Safety Net.
- The government sets two thresholds – one for people who have a concession card issued by Centrelink or Dept. of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), and one for people who do not have a concession card (general patients).
- A pharmacist can tell you what your threshold is.
- Once you reach your Safety Net threshold, you can apply for a PBS Safety Net card, which entitles you and your family members to pay even less for your PBS medicines for the remainder of that calendar year.
- Some brands and types of medicines have an additional surcharge attached to them which does not count toward

the Safety Net threshold. To avoid paying this extra surcharge, you can ask your doctor to prescribe a less expensive brand or type of medicine (if one is available). You can also ask your pharmacist to dispense a less expensive brand (e.g., generic brand) of your medicine.

How it works

- To qualify for the PBS Safety Net, you must keep a record of the PBS medicines supplied to you and your family.
- If you always go to the same pharmacy, all of your PBS costs can be recorded by the pharmacy's computer, but if you use more than one pharmacy, you need to keep your own record.
- If you are keeping your own record, you need to use a 'Prescription Record Form' (PRF), which you can get from any pharmacy.
- Every time you have a PBS prescription filled for yourself or a family member, hand your Medicare card, Centrelink or DVA concession card and Prescription Record Form to the pharmacist so that the prescription and its cost can be recorded.
- PBS medicines may be supplied through community or hospital pharmacies.
- When you reach the PBS Safety Net threshold, your pharmacist can issue your Safety Net Card.

- Your pharmacist will need to see your Prescription Record Form, Medicare card and concession card before issuing a Safety Net Card.

What price is recorded?

The medicine price recorded for Safety Net purposes is the price of the cheapest brand, which may be less than the price you pay for the brand you use. If you use a more expensive brand of your medicine, the additional surcharge for that brand does not count towards your PBS Safety Net threshold

Who can you include in your family?

For the Safety Net Scheme, your family can include:

- Your legally married or de facto partner
- Children under the age of 16 who are under your or your partner's care and responsibility
- Full time students dependent on you or your partner.

Non-PBS prescriptions

Your doctor might give you a prescription for a medicine that isn't subsidized by the PBS, or isn't on the PBS for your condition. This is sometimes called a 'private prescription'. Your doctor will note this on your prescription and you will need to pay the full price for the medicine. The cost of non-PBS prescriptions does not count towards your PBS Safety Net.

Safety Net 20 day rule

If you buy a PBS medicine less than 20 days after a previous supply of the same medicine, the cost may not count towards your PBS Safety Net threshold. If you have already reached the Safety Net you may have to pay your pre-Safety Net price. Ask a pharmacist for advice.

Important

- Do not use another person's medicine or give or sell your medicine to another person.
- Read all medicine labels and follow directions carefully.
- Do not stock up on medicines – only fill a prescription repeat when you need more of your medicine.
- Learn about your medicines – ask your pharmacist or doctor.
- Review your medicines with your doctor and pharmacist regularly. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the medicines you are using, including natural and herbal medicines.
- It is illegal to take or send PBS medicines overseas that are not for your personal use or the use of someone travelling with you. A doctor's prescription or letter confirming your medicines may be enough for passing through Customs, but some countries may require a letter from the Australian Government.

For more information

Medicare Australia

Website: www.medicareaustralia.gov.au

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

PBS Information Line

Phone: 1800 020 613

Website: www.health.gov.au/pbs

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when
choosing a medicine.*

Related fact cards

- » *Generic Medicines*
- » *The PBS and You (website only – ask your pharmacist)*
- » *Travel Health*
- » *Wise Use of Medicines (website only – ask your pharmacist)*

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