

# The PBS and you

**The Australian Government's Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) aims to provide all Australian residents with affordable, reliable and timely access to a wide range of prescription medicines. The PBS subsidises medicine costs, enabling consumers to purchase expensive medicines at much lower prices.**

## How to get the PBS subsidy

- The PBS is available to all Australian residents and eligible visitors from countries with which Australia has a Reciprocal Health-Care Agreement. This includes the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway and Sweden.
- Centrelink Concession and Safety Net Card holders are entitled to an additional government subsidy for PBS medicines.
- Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) Repatriation Card holders are entitled to subsidised medicines under the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS).
- Your pharmacist must verify that you are eligible for the PBS subsidy, so show your Medicare Card or Veterans Repatriation Card (Gold Card, White Card or Orange Card) when you have a prescription filled. For an additional subsidy, you will also need to show your Centrelink Concession Card or Safety Net Card. DVA White Card holders should provide their White Card file number for RPBS medicines and their Medicare Card number for PBS prescriptions.
- If you are a visitor from a country with which Australia has a Reciprocal Health-Care Agreement and you want a prescription dispensed under the PBS you must show your passport to the pharmacist.

- When a pharmacist has dispensed your prescription, you must sign the prescription to verify that all the entitlement information on the prescription is accurate and that you have received the PBS medicine.
- You must pay a 'patient co-payment' toward the cost of your PBS medicine. The amount of the co-payment is adjusted in line with inflation on 1 January each year.

## Why you sometimes pay more

### Brand premium

There are often several brands of the same medicine available. All brands on the Australian market comply with government standards for quality, safety and effectiveness, but some cost more than others. The less expensive brands are commonly called generic medicines.

- Each brand of a PBS medicine is subsidised to the same amount – up to the cost of the lowest priced brand.
- If you use a higher priced brand, you pay the difference between the subsidised price and the higher priced brand. This 'brand premium' is payable in addition to the patient co-payment and does not count towards the Safety Net.
- To avoid extra costs, ask your doctor to prescribe or your pharmacist to dispense a fully subsidised brand of your medicine.

### Therapeutic Group Premium

When there are two or more different medicines (active ingredients) on the PBS that have similar therapeutic effects, the PBS provides a subsidy up to the cost of the least expensive medicine. If you use a higher priced medicine within a therapeutic group, you pay the difference between the subsidised price and the higher priced medicine. This 'therapeutic premium' is payable in addition to the patient co-payment and does not count towards the Safety Net.

- To avoid extra costs, ask your doctor about other appropriate medicines to treat your condition. Sometimes this cost cannot be avoided.

### Special Patient Contribution

A special patient contribution (SPC) is applied to a medicine when the manufacturer and the government cannot agree on the dispensed price of the medicine.

Your doctor may be able to obtain an authority from Medicare Australia to waive the SPC.

### Non-PBS medicines

- Some medicines are only subsidised by the PBS for certain medical conditions and specific criteria must be met to obtain a PBS subsidy for these medicines. If your condition does not meet the criteria, you will have to pay the full price.

- Not all medicines on the market are listed on the PBS. The prices of non-PBS medicines are subject to normal market forces and may vary between pharmacies.

## Medicare Australia administers the PBS

- Medicare Australia uses the information on your prescription to reimburse the pharmacist for the subsidised amount of your PBS medicine.
- Medicare Australia may monitor prescriptions to identify people who are obtaining more PBS medicine than they need. Medicare Australia has authority to provide this information to the prescriber.
- If you have concerns about the use of your PBS medicine information, contact the Office of the Privacy Commissioner on 1300 363 992 or visit [www.privacy.gov.au](http://www.privacy.gov.au)

## Repeats on PBS prescriptions

Once a PBS medicine has been supplied to a patient, a pharmacist should not dispense it again:

- Within the next 20 days, if more than four repeats are allowed by the PBS for that medicine (excluding eye preparations); or
- Within the next four days for any other medicine.

## Important

- Storing large quantities of medicines at home can lead to confusion, using medicines past their use by date and accidental poisoning. Fill prescriptions only as needed for personal use and do not stockpile medicines or give medicines to others.
- Take unwanted or expired medicines to your pharmacy for correct disposal.
- It is illegal to take or send PBS medicines overseas unless they are for personal use. A doctor's prescription or letter confirming your medicines may be adequate for passing through Customs, but some countries may require a letter from the Australian Government.

There are special arrangements to allow repeats to be dispensed early if needed, but early re-supplies for certain PBS medicines are not eligible for Safety Net benefits. Ask a pharmacist.

## For more information

### **PBS Information Line**

Phone: 1800 020 613

Website: [www.health.gov.au/pbs](http://www.health.gov.au/pbs)

### **Medicare Australia**

Website: [www.medicareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au)

### **Healthdirect Australia**

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://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](http://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

» *Help with Medicine Costs (PBS Safety Net)*

» *Generic Medicines*

» *Wise Use of Medicines (website only – ask your pharmacist)*

Your Self Care Pharmacy: