

# RACGP supports easier access to medicines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people - Royal Australian College of GPs

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The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) has welcomed changes that will expand the range of health professionals who are able to register eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to a program that affords access to cheaper medicines.

The Closing the Gap (CTG) Prescription Benefits Scheme (PBS) Co-payment [program](#) was established in 2010 to improve access to affordable PBS medicines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with, or at risk of, chronic disease.

Under [the new changes](#) now in effect, any PBS prescriber or eligible Aboriginal Health Practitioner can register eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for the program.

Chair of the RACGP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Faculty and Wiradjuri man, Professor Peter O'Mara, said he backed the changes to the program.

"I support these changes to the Closing the Gap PBS co-payment program because they are a positive step forward," he said.

"Expanding access to Closing the Gap scripts for all patients regardless of where they live, where they got the prescription from and their chronic disease status will make a real difference.

"Previously, it used to be that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had to sign up but now the process has been made simpler and less centralised.

"Under these changes, people who fall under the program can go anywhere to access cheaper medicines – it is much more straightforward and that can only be a good thing.

"At the end of the day, if we want to get serious about addressing health disparities affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, we need to pursue practical initiatives just like this. If we can increase access, we can encourage preventative healthcare and enhance wellbeing."

Professor O'Mara noted that sound implementation of the changes was vital.

"I am already hearing reports from the pharmacy sector about issues implementing the program, including problems with communication with pharmacies," he said.

"It is not my place to comment on the specifics of that; however, I certainly hope any issues are resolved quickly because I think these changes can do a lot of good."

RACGP President Dr Karen Price endorsed Professor O'Mara's comments.

"I fully support the strong commitment of the RACGP and its board to Closing the Gap initiatives, including this latest change," she said.

"It is another reminder of the legacy of the NAIDOC week theme 'Heal Country' and a really strong step in the right direction."

Details concerning NAIDOC week can be found [here](#).

Information for prescribers is available [here](#). There is also an eLearning module available that has been updated to cover the program changes, see [here](#).

~ENDS

RACGP spokespeople are available for comment.

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