



# MEDIA RELEASE

9 May 2023

Harm Reduction Australia (HRA) welcomes the announcement in tonight's Federal Budget that will see \$377.3m over 4 years (with \$98.4m ongoing) invested in making access more affordable under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) for the Opioid Dependence Treatment Program (ODTP).

For several years HRA has led advocacy efforts towards the removal of unfair ODTP dispensing fees through the work of our [Treatment Equity Project](#) which builds on decades of ongoing advocacy highlighting the negative impact these unregulated and discriminatory fees have had on people's ability to access and remain in treatment. HRA has maintained that these daily fees are discriminatory because no other Australian is made to routinely pay an unregulated, private daily fee to the pharmacy just to access PBS-listed medications that are essential for their health and wellbeing.

Mr Gino Vumbaca OAM, HRA President further stressed that *"People on opioid dependence treatment are some of the most marginalised and vulnerable people in the Australian community. We know a majority of people on the Opioid Dependence Treatment Program are living on low, fixed incomes and these fees, which are typically between \$5 and \$15 per day, represent a considerable proportion of people's incomes and are simply discriminatory and unaffordable for most people on the ODTP"*.

HRA congratulates the Australian Government and the Hon Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health & Aged Care, for stepping up to the plate and providing funding that should address this longstanding inequity in Australia's drug treatment system.

*"HRA remains committed to ensuring that people on the ODTP are treated the same as other Australians when they access PBS listed medications (such as the ODTP medications methadone, buprenorphine and buprenorphine/naloxone) through community pharmacy. We are not seeking special treatment, just equity including access to the PBS consumer co-pay and Safety Net"* Mr Vumbaca added.



To this end, HRA looks forward to continuing to work closely with the Federal Government and Minister Butler on the implementation of tonight's Budget announcement and continuing to provide expert advice on ending the current discriminatory arrangements.

*"By any measure, this is an unprecedented and very welcome development that HRA believes has the potential to positively impact on people's lives. The Federal Government should be congratulated for this significant investment in a more affordable and equitable treatment system, but we should never have had to fight for decades to stop such an obvious injustice at the heart of ODTP. HRA would therefore also like to acknowledge the Australian Greens (Senator Steele-John & former Senator Siewert), Independent Senator Pocock and, the non-government organisation Better Access Australia (BAA) for their unflinching support and willingness to work with HRA to ensure a just, fair, and equitable health system is available to everyone in the Australian community"* concluded Mr Vumbaca.

Finally, HRA would also like to acknowledge the many individuals and organisations that have contributed to the extensive advocacy efforts over many decades and which have ultimately led to the announcement tonight to make affordable and equitable opioid dependence treatment a reality in Australia. Specifically, HRA would like to acknowledge the work of people on ODTP and their representative organisations who have consistently called for this change for many years and whose work has also contributed to this important outcome.

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**For further information please contact Mr Gino Vumbaca, HRA President on 0408 244 552**

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Harm Reduction Australia is a national organisation committed to reducing the health, social and economic harms potentially associated with drug use and drug policy responses. HRA takes a non-judgmental approach to drug use within society and recognises the key role people with lived/living experience of drug use must play in any effective drug policy solutions. HRA works collaboratively to ensure reform to current drug policy with the primary aims of ending imprisonment, stigmatisation, discrimination, and human rights violations against the people who use/have used drugs. We are dedicated to comprehensive drug law reform in Australia through the promotion of evidence-based, sensible, and safer drug policies.

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