**Australian Medical Association**



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(SOUTH AUSTRALIA) INC.

ABN 91 028 693 268

19 October 2017

The Hon. Peter Malinauskas

Minister for Health

GPO Box 2555  Adelaide  SA  5001

healthministerforhealth@sa.gov.au

Dear Minister

**Support for the TGA decision to make codeine prescription-only medicine**

Thank you for your support for the decision by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) to make codeine a prescription-only medicine from February 2018. The Australian Medical Association (SA) strongly supports the decision to change codeine scheduling to address the rising incidence of dependency and deaths due to excessive codeine use in Australia.

The AMA(SA), along with consumer health advocates, is concerned about a campaign by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia (the Guild) for an alternative model which would enable pharmacists to dispense non-prescription codeine in rural areas. We are concerned that this will potentially lead to increased harms and preventable deaths and will not serve rural people well. While the Guild has argued that this is needed because rural patients cannot access GPs out of hours, most rural pharmacies do not have extended hours and this strategy would not address the problem.

As you are aware, there are good reasons to re-schedule codeine because the risk of harm greatly outweighs the benefits of self-medication. The number of Australians being treated for codeine addiction has more than tripled over the decade to 2012-13, from 318 to more than 1000 a year. The number of codeine-related deaths continued to rise when pharmacists were given responsibility for ensuring safe non-prescription codeine sales in 2010.

The TGA noted there are better ways to treat pain and, indeed, there is no evidence that low-dose codeine is more effective than placebos in treating chronic or long term pain. Over-the-counter alternatives combining ibuprofen and paracetamol are more effective analgesics than over-the-counter codeine containing analgesics.

We strongly oppose exemptions in individual jurisdictions which would undermine nationally consistent regulation of medicine and we urge you to continue to support the TGA’s evidence-based decision. It is essential for public safety that the TGA is allowed and supported to make evidence-based decisions about medicines, free from political interference and sectional interests. We would be pleased to provide more information on the issue if you require it.

Yours sincerely

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**Mr Joe Hooper**

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE