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MEDIA RELEASE

NATIONAL MEDICINES POLICY: OUTDATED AND NEEDING REVIEW

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AUSTRALIA'S 20-year-old National Medicines Policy (NMP) lags behind other developed nations as 21st century phenomena such as disruptive innovation, precision medicine and climate change have changed the landscape, according to the authors of a Perspective published online today by the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

Developed cooperatively by the government, the pharmaceutical industry, health care professionals and consumers in 1999, the NMP provided “overarching policy direction around four interlinked pillars: timely access to the medicines that Australians need and at an affordable cost; medicines meeting appropriate standards of quality, safety and efficacy; quality use of medicines; and maintaining a responsible and viable medicines industry”.

Associate Professor Orin Chisholm, Program Director of Pharmaceutical Medicine at the University of NSW, and her coauthor, Dr Brendan Shaw, Principal at Shawview Consulting and Adjunct Senior Lecturer at UNSW, wrote that a broad review of the NMP and its progress in achieving its objectives had never been undertaken.

“The world and Australia today are nothing like they were back in 1999,” wrote Chisholm and Shaw. “Even if the four pillars in the original policy stand the test of time, the issues around them have evolved.

“The NMP should be comprehensively reviewed with a brief to involve all stakeholders in the medicines system in a broad consultation process.

“The review should consider the strategic background and issues that influence Australia’s medicines policy environment today and into the future to improve the health outcomes of Australians.

“How will disruptive innovation, digital and information technologies, precision medicine, the interaction of medicines with devices and diagnostics, changing consumer preferences in areas such as complementary medicines, an ageing population, climate change, immigration, the geopolitical and economic environment, and the emerging economies in the world affect Australia’s medicines policy environment going forward?” Chisholm and Shaw asked.

They suggested some issues which should be included in the review – pharmaceutical waste disposal and environmental protection; management and disposal of unsafe and unwanted medicines; antimicrobial resistance and antibiotics; information technology, data analysis, web-based systems; electronic media; patient responsibility and health literacy; health workforce planning and development; intellectual property; and globalisation, international cooperation and global health issues.

“Finally, there is a need for an awareness campaign for policy makers, politicians, the private sector, stakeholders and the community on what the NMP is and what it does,” Chisholm and Shaw concluded.

“A review of the NMP is overdue and could not be timelier with its 20th anniversary fast approaching.”

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