



CASE STUDY

Australia's Expanded Scope of Practice:

Empowering Pharmacists,
Transforming Healthcare

November 26, 2024





Queensland, AU

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Introduction



It's a typical weekday morning in regional Queensland

With a troubling cough that has persisted for several days, 55-year-old Sarah calls for an appointment with her GP. The earliest they can see her is next Thursday afternoon, six days from now. A telehealth appointment is possible, but not appropriate for her symptoms. Anxious and uncomfortable, she heads to a nearby emergency department, where she waits six hours until seen.

Finally, she is diagnosed with a mild respiratory infection, prescribed an antibiotic, and released. It's something that could have been handled by a local pharmacist, too — if only they were empowered to examine and treat her.

The scenario is common in Australia, where GP shortages and long waiting times—especially in remote, rural, and regional areas—are straining the healthcare system.

To address this, the country's Expanded Scope of Practice initiatives are actively empowering pharmacists to provide a wider range of services, easing the burden on other healthcare providers and addressing growing patient needs.



The Challenges Driving Change



2. The Challenges Driving Change

Workforce Strain and Patient Needs

Australia's aging population and underinvestment in healthcare infrastructure have created a strain on its healthcare system. Additionally, GP shortages, particularly in rural and remote areas, have created long treatment delays and overcrowded emergency departments—often with cases that could be managed in pharmacies.

Highly trained pharmacists are widespread nationwide and are well-positioned to manage certain conditions traditionally overseen by GPs, particularly minor ailments and routine medication management.

MedAdvisor Solutions is using technology to help pharmacies address these challenges. By streamlining administrative tasks and improving workflow efficiency, MedAdvisor's cloud-based platforms allow pharmacists to focus on patient care and take on expanded clinical roles. This technology supports the Expanded Scope of Practice initiatives and helps reduce the strain on GPs and emergency departments.



Expanded Scope of Practice



3. Expanded Scope of Practice

A New Era in Healthcare

Launched in 2020, Australia's evolving Scope of Practice initiative is designed to improve access to healthcare, reduce waiting times and enhance workforce retention.

By expanding the roles of pharmacists, the initiative empowers them to administer vaccines, conduct consultations, prescribe medications for minor conditions and even supply contraceptives. This is particularly valuable in remote, rural and regional settings where access to health services is limited, ensuring more patients receive timely care from trusted professionals.



Carolyn Clementson
Prescribing Pharmacist,
Good Price Pharmacy Warehouse

We recently sat down with Carolyn Clementson, Director at Australasian College of Pharmacy, a member-based organisation for pharmacists in Australia and New Zealand, and a prescribing pharmacist for Good Price Pharmacy Warehouse, to gain first-hand impressions of the initiative.

Clementson describes how that is playing out for her and her colleagues:

“Of course, having patients book consultations, conducting consults, and prescribing are the really obvious and visible evolutions, but it is really much more than that. My approach to patient care has shifted... I think in general, I am taking more responsibility for the patient's overall health.”

Empowering Pharmacists in Community Health



4. Empowering Pharmacists in Community Health

Pharmacists are already among the most trusted health professionals in Australia, recognised for their expertise in pharmacotherapy and disease management.

Despite their extensive training, legislative barriers have historically limited pharmacists' scope of practice. However, recent changes are paving the way for pharmacists to take on additional responsibilities, such as managing urinary tract infections, conducting dermatological assessments and providing travel health consultations.

These expanded roles allow them to fully utilise their training in medication safety, chronic disease management and preventive care, strengthening their role in community health.

However, the ability of pharmacists to assume these expanded roles, while dependent on their training and expertise, also requires a robust technological infrastructure to support efficient and secure service delivery.



84%

of Australians trust the advice they receive from pharmacists

Pharmacy Guild of Australia

Technology



The MedAdvisor for Pharmacy platform is used by more than 95% of Australian pharmacies.

5. Technology

The Foundation for Change



The MedAdvisor for Pharmacy platform has been overwhelmingly successful and today is used by more than 95% of Australian pharmacies, empowering pharmacists to deliver high-quality care while improving operational efficiency. Selected by Australian governments as the preferred software provider for its Scope of Practice pilots and clinical trials, MedAdvisor Solutions has delivered real-time clinical information management, secure communications, prescribing and integration with national digital health infrastructure. This has empowered pharmacists to meet the demands of their expanded roles.

“The software is super important for the data collection,” Clementson said.

“It also provides us with a purpose-built tool for our clinical notes that are necessary for us to be able to practice efficiently and safely. I am confident that the software platforms will evolve as our practice does and these platforms will become even more integral to our practice.”

Results in Action: Queensland and New South Wales



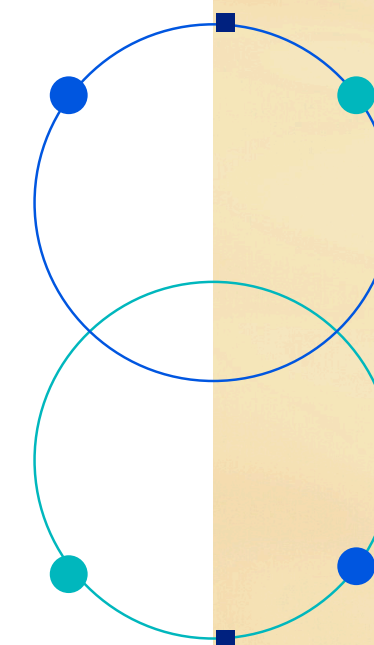
6. Results in Action

Queensland and New South Wales

Queensland Pilot

The Queensland Community Pharmacy Scope of Practice Pilot is a key example of the success of this initiative. Launched in April 2024, this pilot program allows pharmacists to diagnose and treat up to 23 common health conditions, including acute care, chronic conditions and medication management. The program was designed to address regional healthcare shortages, particularly in remote areas where access to GPs is limited.

The results from this pilot have been promising. Up to 100 pharmacies have passed the rigorous eligibility tests set by the government with more pharmacists completing the extensive training each week. The pilot has already demonstrated that pharmacists are well-positioned and eager to assume additional clinical responsibilities. MedAdvisor Solutions' technology has been critical to the pilot's success, providing the necessary infrastructure and data reporting for smooth implementation, operation and evaluation.



Pharmacists are
well-positioned and
eager to assume
additional clinical
responsibilities

Results

AU

**100,000+ services across
3700+ pharmacies**

NSW

**32,000 services across
1,200 pharmacies**

QLD

**1,000 services across
45 pharmacies**

New South Wales Clinical Trial

New South Wales launched a clinical trial in July 2024, focusing on dermatological care. This program allows pharmacists to assess and treat the minor skin conditions eczema, mild plaque psoriasis, impetigo and dermatitis. Pharmacists are managing these conditions effectively, providing patients with local care that reduces the need for specialist referrals.

Bottom-Line Benefits

Overall, the program has delivered measurable, bottom-line benefits, improving both operational efficiency and enhanced patient care facilitating over 70,000 urinary tract infection (UTI) consultations across more than 3,500 pharmacies. These numbers demonstrate the scale and real-world impact of MedAdvisor's platform in improving access to care and delivering important healthcare services.

As at 26 November 2024



The Expanded Scope of Practice gives patients more options and more pathways to access care which ultimately will improve their health and health experience. It engages pharmacists in what they are doing and provides more tangible outcomes, satisfaction, and purpose in work.

Carolyn Clementson

Prescribing Pharmacist, Good Price Pharmacy Warehouse

Key Considerations for Long-Term Success



7. Key Considerations for Long-Term Success

While the benefits of the Expanded Scope of Practice are significant, implementing pharmacists' expanded roles requires a strategic approach to ensure the program's long-term success.

Training and Education

Pharmacists must undergo additional training and education to expand their scope of practice, which can be costly and time-consuming. To address financial barriers, the Queensland Government offers subsidies of up to \$7,000 for pharmacists participating in the Queensland Community Pharmacy Scope of Practice Pilot. Managed by the Australasian College of Pharmacy, the training subsidy covers essential components such as clinical and prescribing training.

Pharmacists must successfully complete the course within 18 months to retain the subsidy, adding further pressure to the process. (In fact, students must repay the subsidy if they begin but do not successfully complete the course.)

While this funding helps ease the financial burden, it still requires pharmacists to invest significant time and effort into the education process—no easy task if they are working full-time.



Physical Infrastructure

Another significant consideration lies in the physical infrastructure required for pharmacies to provide expanded services. Pharmacies offering certain expanded clinical services require private consulting rooms equipped with a bed, hot and cold water, and additional space to ensure patient privacy. This can be a costly investment for pharmacies, especially in smaller pharmacies that may not have the space or resources to meet these new demands.

Program Evaluation and Monitoring

Regular assessments by governance committees are necessary to ensure the quality and safety of the Scope of Practice initiatives. At a minimum, these will identify areas for improvement to help ensure that patients are receiving high-quality care.

Collaborative Care



8. Collaborative Care

One of the core challenges of expanding pharmacists' roles is ensuring effective collaboration between pharmacists and other healthcare providers.

Co-ordinating seamless communication and integration across healthcare providers and geographical areas can be complex. Pharmacists need access to shared patient records and effective communication channels with GPs and specialists. MedAdvisor Solutions' digital tools play an important role in facilitating this collaboration utilising seamlessly integrated secure communication platforms. These will be critical to deliver care that is efficient and effective.

"We need to collaborate with other practitioners more meaningfully," Clementson said. "It is vital to reduce any perception, real or otherwise, of fragmentation of care. Effective collaboration will actually enhance patient care, ensure consistency of care and reduce inefficiency... Ideally, we will become an integrated part of the patient's primary care team, referring to doctors and other allied health practitioners as needed to get the best outcome for the patient."

Carolyn Clementson
Prescribing Pharmacist, Good Price
Pharmacy Warehouse

Of course, having patients book consultations, conducting consults, and prescribing are the really obvious and visible evolutions, but it is really much more than that. My approach to patient care has shifted.

There are lots of things that I became more aware of during our training that I apply not only to full scope consultations but to OTC presentations and regular conversations with patients too. I am much more conscious of red flags, and I am taking more responsibility for the patient's overall health.

I thought I practiced collaboratively with patients before, but I definitely take more time now to understand what the patients' goals and preferences are and involve them in the decision making.

Carolyn Clementson

Prescribing Pharmacist,

Good Price Pharmacy Warehouse

Pharmacy of the Future



9. Pharmacy of the Future

Empowering the Pharmacy of the Future to Meet Australia's Growing Healthcare Needs

As Australia's healthcare system faces growing challenges, technology-driven solutions like those offered by MedAdvisor Solutions are essential in preparing pharmacies to meet future demands. By optimising workflows, reducing administrative burdens and enhancing clinical services, MedAdvisor's technology supports pharmacies to handle increased responsibilities, capability that Clementson believes will be essential as the expanded scope of practice initiative matures.

"Ongoing management and optimising treatment of chronic conditions will be one of the next steps for our scope of practice," she said, before ticking off predictions for what practice areas could be next. "I think the acute or everyday conditions will largely become our remit. There are other conditions that we could assist with. We see cellulitis and upper respiratory tract infections all the time."

With overwhelmed emergency departments, GP shortages and rising healthcare demands, pharmacies are emerging as timely and important healthcare destinations. By expanding their scope of practice, pharmacists can enhance patient engagement and improve patient outcomes, positioning them as key players in the future of Australian healthcare.

A Look Ahead



10. A Look Ahead

As the initiative matures, pharmacists are assuming even broader responsibilities. For instance, in New South Wales, pharmacists have begun treating more complex conditions, such as ear infections, wound management, nausea, gastro-oesophageal reflux disease, acne and muscle and joint pain. These expansions further empower pharmacists to address patient needs while alleviating the burden on overstretched GPs and emergency departments.

These advancements seen in Australia offer important lessons for other countries struggling with healthcare shortages amidst aging populations. Training and upskilling pharmacists to handle expanded roles effectively is central to any expanded scope of

practice transformation, ensuring they meet clinical standards, and equipping them with the resources to succeed. Investment in infrastructure, such as consultation spaces and technology for secure data handling, is equally important.

Finally, coordination with primary care physicians will be foundational to any program's success. Seamless communication and shared patient records are essential to enhance patient outcomes.

Australia's expanded scope of practice model demonstrates how empowering pharmacists can create a more accessible, efficient, and patient-centered healthcare system, one that meets the evolving demands of their populations.

Lessons Learned

Education

Training and upskilling pharmacists is essential.

Infrastructure

Investment in physical resources enables expanded services.

Collaboration

Effective coordination with primary care providers supports integrated care.

About MedAdvisors Solutions

MedAdvisor Solutions remains committed to a healthier future where pharmacists are seamlessly integrated into the primary care delivery system. By seizing every patient engagement as an opportunity for positive health change, we empower individuals to take control of their health with confidence and clarity through patient engagement resources that support medication management and drive positive outcomes.

AI will redefine the pharmacy in 2025 by driving a new era of personalised patient engagement. We won't only see streamlined workflows, but also a transformation of how pharmacies empower patients and how they bridge gaps in underserved communities by providing better medication access and education

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