

Half a million Australians missing out on cheaper medicines due to outdated systems

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Nearly half a million eligible Australians are missing out on cheaper medicines due to an outdated manual tracking system that should be automated.

The Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) is calling for urgent automation of the PBS Safety Net system after it was revealed 495,865 people who qualified for the benefits in 2024 missed out due to the current paper-based tracking system.

This means almost half a million people are paying more than they should for essential medicine, paying full price for medication when they should have received significant discounts.

“The PBS Safety Net is supposed to protect Australians from high medicine costs, but the reality is too many people don’t even realise they’re eligible,” CEO of CHF Dr Elizabeth Deveny said.

“We all want to know what benefits we’re entitled to - this should be simple.”

“The current system is failing hundreds of thousands of Australians who simply don’t know it exists, let alone how to track their spending or apply for it.”

The current PBS Safety Net system relies on pharmacists or consumers manually tracking prescriptions, usually requiring people to visit the same pharmacy repeatedly, which is an impractical requirement for many Australians.

“It’s 2025, surely we can do better than using a manual paper-based tracking system. We wouldn’t accept a paper-based system for the Medicare Safety Net, so why do we accept it for the PBS Safety Net?” Dr Deveny said.

“We all know Australians are struggling with the cost of living - fixing this is a no-brainer. We are hearing disturbing accounts of people delaying, skipping or rationing their medication just because they can’t afford it. This leads to poorer health outcomes and higher long-term healthcare costs not only for the consumer but also the healthcare system as a whole. Medicine is essential, and no one should be going without it.”

While concessional PBS Safety Net recipients increased from 1.2 million in 2019 to 2.2 million in 2024, general population recipients actually decreased from 125,964 to 101,605 during the same period.



“We’re worried working families and young professionals who earn just enough not to qualify for concession cards are missing out - simply due to a lack of awareness,” Dr Deveny said.

“Everybody benefits when Australians can afford the medicines they need, and a healthier population means a stronger economy,” Dr Deveny said.

“The government needs to introduce an automated real-time PBS spend tracking system that would automatically apply benefits once consumers hit the threshold, similar to the Medicare Safety Net.”