



National Prescribing Service Limited

MEDIA RELEASE

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Generic medicines are an equal choice

With an estimated 77 per cent of Australians suffering a long-term health condition that is expected to last six months or more¹, it's important people are aware of their medicine options.

The *Generic medicines are an equal choice* campaign, being run by the National Prescribing Service Ltd (NPS), aims to provide consumers with the evidence-based information they need to make more informed choices about their medicine use.

"Generic medicines are an equal choice. They contain the same active ingredient as original brand medicines and meet the same government standards," NPS CEO, Lynn Weekes, said.

The active ingredient in a medicine is what makes the medicine work; this is known as the therapeutic effect. Manufacturers must demonstrate their generic brand works in the same way in the body (ie. has the same therapeutic effect) for it to be listed as a substitute on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) to the original brand medicine.

"All medicines that are marketed in Australia must meet the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) standards. The TGA requires generic medicines to be stringently assessed to ensure they contain the same active ingredient as the original brand medicines and demonstrate bioequivalence," Dr Weekes said.

The reason generic medicines are sometimes a different size, shape or colour to the original brand medicine is because the inactive ingredients such as fillers or coatings do not have to be the same.

"If you are considering switching to a generic medicine, speak with your GP or pharmacist first. They will know if there is a generic option available and whether it's suitable for you. Your GP or pharmacist will also be able to point out the active ingredient and answer any questions you may have. As some medicines have several generic brands, it is recommended that if you decide to switch to a generic brand you continue with that brand to avoid confusion," Dr Weekes concluded.

As generic medicines do not carry brand premiums (a small cost some originator brands charge on top of the price the patient pays), there may be cost savings associated with choosing a generic medicine, between \$1-\$4 per item.

The main benefits to consumers will be the future viability of the PBS. By helping to reduce the cost to the government, Australians are playing a part in ensuring the PBS is sustainable, giving us all access to new and existing necessary medicines at affordable prices.

For more information about generic medicines visit www.nps.org.au/genericmedicines or phone Medicines Line on 1300 888 763.

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Media enquiries to Katie Butt, Media Adviser, 0419 618 365 or email kbutt@nps.org.au.

Radio grabs are available for download at
www.nps.org.au/news_and_media_home/campaigns/generic_medicines_campaign

¹ AIHW Australia's Health 2008, www.aihw.gov.au/publications/aus/ah08/ah08.pdf



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Background information

The NPS' *Generics are an equal choice campaign* is funded by the Australian Government as part of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) Reforms package, which aims to give Australians continued access to new medicines while ensuring the PBS remains affordable into the future.

The main changes, which came into effect on 1 August 2008, relate specifically to pharmacy and pharmaceutical wholesaler compensation arrangements. As a result it is anticipated consumers will be more frequently offered the generic brand medicine option when getting a prescription dispensed, making it important they have access to information which will help them make an informed decision.

NPS agreed to run this campaign because it ties in neatly with the organisation's core aims and values, which are to provide accurate, balanced, evidence-based information and services to help people choose if, when and how to use medicines to improve their health and wellbeing.

The multi-faceted campaign includes an integrated series of television commercials, online resources and marketing, in-pharmacy advertising, and a tool kit for community pharmacy staff to support them when discussing generic medicines options with consumers. It also includes a range of community-based activities that will focus on seniors and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The television commercials, which include two 30-second and two 15-second features, will air for two weeks from October 27 on all commercial stations in regional and metropolitan areas across Australia.

The NPS campaign aims to ensure people know that a generic medicine contains the same active ingredient as the original brand of medicine and that they know where and how to find accurate information so they can make informed choices about generic medicines.

NPS has provided community pharmacies with resources to assist them in discussing the choices of generic medicines, the active ingredient and the possible cost savings that generic medicines have. This includes new ancillary labels to go on medicine packs once a medicine has been dispensed that state the active ingredient and what brand medicine it replaces.

This campaign launches off the success of 2007 *Get to Know your Medicine* and *Generic Medicine* campaigns which won an International Gold Quill Award for Excellence and the 2008 Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) National Golden Target Award. NPS is also a finalist in the Marketing Institute of Australia's Marketing Excellence Awards.

The National Prescribing Service Limited (NPS) is an independent, non-profit organisation for Quality Use of Medicine funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

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