



SCRIPTWISE

Federal Budget

Submission

2018

Script
Wise

Preventing
prescription
medication
misuse.

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30 January 2018

Hon Scott Morrison
Treasurer
PO Box Canberra ACT 6022

Dear The Hon. Scott Morrison,

RE: Pre-Budget Submission 2018/19 – ScriptWise

On behalf of ScriptWise, I am pleased to present our pre-budget submission outlining how we can work together towards zero deaths relating to prescription medications by 2030.

Over the last decade, the number of overdose fatalities relating to prescription medications has increased drastically. According to the Penington Institutes 2017 Overdose Report, between 2011 and 2015, 1,737 people aged 30-59 died from a pharmaceutical opioid overdose. This is in contrast to alcohol and illicit drug deaths which are slowly declining. Moreover, the current dynamics within Australia suggest that there will be a continued increase in the use of both opioid painkillers and benzodiazepines. For example, Australia has an ageing population, and 30 per cent of the population is expected to experience chronic pain in their lifetime.

In our efforts to reduce the number of fatalities and the growing cost of this issue on the Australian health system, we believe that more resources need to be invested in primary prevention and early intervention. It is crucial that consumers understand quality use of medicines in relation to their health care, and play a central role in the safe and effective use of their medications.

ScriptWise is confident that with the support of the Federal Government, Australia is well placed to prevent prescription medication misuse from becoming more prevalent and severe, as has been seen in other countries such as the United States. Our proposal will deliver the following to achieve our goal:

Prevention

- A nationwide public awareness campaign to increase health literacy around the issue of prescription medication misuse and addiction, focusing on opioid painkillers and benzodiazepines

Policy

- The revision of the National Pharmaceutical Misuse Framework for Action (2012-2015) to ensure that preventative strategies to address prescription drug misuse and addiction become a national priority
- Advocacy for all States and Territories to adopt integrated national RTPM

Research

- A better understanding of the economic costs associated with the underlying causes of, and potential solutions, for addressing misuse of prescription medications and its impact on the Australian economy

In order to achieve our mission, we are requesting the Australian Government invest approximately \$2 million for the period of July 2018 to June 2020.

Kind Regards,



Norhawa Bee Mohamed Ismail
CEO

Executive Summary

Prescription medication misuse and addiction is a growing public health problem in Australia. Almost four Australians die from an overdose each day and the majority of these deaths are [linked to prescription medications](#). This has a tragic toll on families and communities and leads to increased costs on the healthcare system.

Our primary objective at ScriptWise is to educate all Australians about the safe and appropriate use of prescription medications. Through forming strong relationships with the many families and individuals who have been personally affected, we seek to amplify their voices and concerns. We also work collaboratively with health care providers and organisations to prevent prescription medication misuse and addiction within local communities.

In order to address this public health crisis in Australia, ScriptWise requests \$2 million from the Federal Government to support the continued delivery of a public education, awareness-raising and preventative strategies to reduce misuse and overdose fatalities linked to prescription medications over the next two years (2018-2020). The table below highlights an overview of our proposal request:

Proposed initiative	Cost (ex GST)	Timeframe
1. Nationwide public awareness campaign	\$372,000	2019-2020
2. National online information network	\$120,000	2018-2020
3. National advocacy campaign for the roll out of a mandatory, national real-time monitoring system	\$300,000	2018-2019
4. Update the National Pharmaceutical Misuse Framework for Action and hold national consultation workshops	\$280,000	2018-2019
5. Conduct research on the economic impact of prescription medication misuse, addiction and overdose to Australia	\$550,000	2018-2019
6. Conduct research into stigma and barriers preventing Australians from seeking early intervention treatment for prescription medication addiction	\$420,000	2019-2020
TOTAL	\$2,042,000	

About ScriptWise

ScriptWise is a non-profit organisation dedicated to preventing prescription medication misuse, addiction and overdose in Australia. Formed in 2014, ScriptWise seeks to amplify the voices of the alarming number of families and individuals affected by prescription medication dependence, addiction and overdose.

In the words of ScriptWise’s Founding Patron, Kim Ledger, who lost his son Heath Ledger to an accidental prescription medication overdose: “We are motivated by a strong desire to prevent this from happening to any other family in Australia.”

ScriptWise is privately funded by corporations, donations and non-government grants.

Evidence of achievement

ScriptWise works closely with families and individuals who have been personally affected by this issue and service providers such as Primary Health Networks and Pharmacotherapy Networks to effectively prevent misuse at an early stage. Attached in Appendix A is a list of our current partners. To date, we have achieved the following:

- Partnered with a total of 25 organisations in the primary health and community sector to deliver a total of 15 community forums over 24 months
- Active participation in the Nationally Coordinated Codeine Implementation Working Group (NCCIWG), SafeScript External Advisory Committee and led the establishment of working groups in Victoria and Western Australia
- A public awareness campaign based on an inaugural International Overdose Awareness Day event which in 2016 achieved close to 13 million media impressions
- Continued advocacy for national real-time prescription monitoring, particularly in the media. In 2017, we achieved 394 media placements and reached 9.5 million Australians. Through the work of Ambassadors such as Kim Ledger and Margaret and John Millington, ScriptWise was able to demonstrate to the public the very personal cost of prescription medication misuse and dependence.
- Launched a *#LetsTalk* campaign designed to reduce the stigma around seeking help for prescription medication dependence or addiction featuring a video called ‘Faces of Recovery’
- Launched a *Let’s Get Candid about Codeine* campaign in response to codeine rescheduling. ScriptWise established a ‘codeine hub’ with relevant information and numerous videos to inform consumers and health professionals about the upcoming changes
- Launched a *#NotWise* joint campaign with Pain Australia to support new recommendations aimed at reducing prescribing of opioids for chronic pain

A large part of ScriptWise’s campaigns involve social media engagement, the results of which can be seen below:

Social media engagement on Facebook (within the launch week of the campaign)	Let’s Get Candid About Codeine	Let’s Talk	#NotWise
Page engagement:	426 (555% increase)	657 (177% increase)	569 (469% increase)
Weekly total reach:	5,416 (274% increase)	8,752 (188% increase)	8,477 (661% increase)

Video views (including YouTube views)	Over 2,000 views	Over 2,000 views	N/A
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While ScriptWise has been able to achieve significant media results through these targeted campaigns, more resources are needed to ensure we are able to co-generate and disseminate evidence-based messages.

ScriptWise key priorities 2018-2020

ScriptWise focuses on addressing the root causes of this complex and multifaceted issue through primary prevention strategies such as:

- **engaging and educating local communities** on the safe and effective use of prescription medications
- **collaborating to shape policy solutions** that help improve Australians' quality of life such as the implementation of an effective real-time prescription monitoring system across Australia
- **conducting research** to understand the costs associated with, underlying causes of, and potential solutions for, addressing misuse of prescription medications

ScriptWise's focus on early intervention is also based on evidence that preventative measures will minimise the economic burden of prescription opioid and benzodiazepine overdose, misuse and/or addiction. In America, a recent study reported that prescription opioids alone costs the US economy \$78.5 billion a year. With more investment in effective preventative strategies, the Federal Government has the opportunity to safeguard against such extreme economic costs.

The Issue: prescription medication misuse

The extent and dynamics of the problem

The misuse of prescription medication is a health emergency in Australia affecting many families and individuals. While opioid painkillers are an important treatment option for one in five Australians living with chronic non-cancer pain; prescribing, hospitalisations and deaths have increased in recent years. Similarly, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has found that benzodiazepines were reported to be the second most commonly misused class of medications.

Prescription medication misuse, addiction, and overdose is a serious public health problem in Australia. This has been evidenced by hospital admission data, ambulance responses and overdose fatalities. Given the 15-fold increase in the prescribing and subsequent use of opioid painkillers, and close to 7 million prescriptions for benzodiazepines dispensed each year in Australia; it is no surprise that concerns regarding opioid and benzodiazepine dependence are increasingly being voiced by those affected and within primary health care.

Key facts

- Between 2006 and 2016 there was a 127 percent increase in the number of prescription-medication related deaths related to opioids and a 168 percent increase in deaths involving benzodiazepines.
- From 2008 to 2014, there was also a 148 percent increase in prescription opioid deaths in rural and regional Australia.
- Prescription opioids, not heroin, now account for more than two-thirds of accidental opioid overdoses
- Australia recorded the highest number of drug-induced deaths last year since the heroin epidemic of the 1990s, largely due to prescription medications

These figures show that Australia is in the grips of a prescription medication crisis. While much has been done to introduce regulatory changes recently, it is evident that more preventative measures need to be in place to prevent further overdose fatalities.

Gaps and needs analysis

Recent policy efforts to reduce mortality related to prescription medication misuse have commonly focussed on the supply of prescription medication misuse and/or overdose. However, there is an opportunity to address the underlying causes of this crisis through prevention activities that target consumers and community members to reduce the rate of prescribing, the misuse and errors involving pain management medications.

Significant areas for improvement include:

- **A lack of health literacy** regarding prescription medications. Currently more than one-quarter of Australians think non-medical use of pharmaceuticals is acceptable (a 23 percent increase since 2013) and about 1 million Australians reported recent non-medical use of a pharmaceutical
- **Stigma** - People who use pharmaceutical opioids experience drug-related stigma in complex and unique ways, and may adopt secrecy rather than seeking support
- **Prescribing habits** – Australia ranks 8th among the world's top users of prescription opioids with approximately 20,000 doses prescribed for every 1 million people

ScriptWise Budget Priorities and Initiatives

ScriptWise strategic priority one

- engaging and educating local communities on the safe and effective use of prescription medications.

Proposed initiative one: develop and implement a national public awareness campaign with the endorsement of the Federal Government.

Public health campaigns have the possibility of achieving changes in behavior, attitudes and patient health and well-being. This presents a significant opportunity to not only reach individuals who are already thinking of seeking help, but also to allow individuals to gain new information around medications susceptible to misuse, particularly opioid painkillers and benzodiazepines.

Currently, only 1.9 percent of Australians believe painkillers, analgesics or opioids are responsible for the most number of deaths in Australia, and more than 25 percent think non-medical use of pharmaceuticals is acceptable. The low level of health literacy around this issue suggests the urgent need for a public awareness campaign.

A recent study by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre also found that Australians may opt for secrecy rather than seeking support due to the stigma around prescription opioid treatment. This is largely due to the many negative stereotypes around addiction and those who use Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT). Individuals and families affected by prescription drug misuse also regularly report not feeling sure about where to seek help for dependency or addiction issues.

The success of public awareness campaigns to address dangerous and harmful behaviour has been well-documented in Australia. The National Road Safety Strategy, for example, has contributed to a continued decline in the number of deaths on Australian roads. As reported by the Penington Institute's 2017 Annual Overdose Report, the difference between accidental drug-related deaths (1,489 in 2015) and car accidents (712 in 2015) has never been so pronounced, with accidental drug-related deaths more than double the number of deaths associated with car accidents. This difference is even more prominent when acknowledging that deaths from car accidents and accidental drug-related deaths were comparable only 15 years ago.

Internationally, there appears to have been an increase in public awareness campaigns to reduce prescription medication overdose deaths. The US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, for example, recently launched its 'Rx Awareness Campaign' encouraging states, coalitions and communities to implement it in their jurisdictions across the country. A comprehensive analysis of the roll-out of this campaign can be found here.

Victoria will be the first state to launch a statewide public awareness campaign to highlight the issue of prescription medication overdose with the implementation of SafeScript. This campaign could potentially provide a blueprint for a similar project across Australia. This would enable a nationally coordinated and comprehensive information campaign to reach local communities, ensuring no Australians are left behind.

Proposed initiative two: a comprehensive, national online information network for consumers

To date, there remains no central information point for consumers to gain knowledge about the prescription medication crisis. A driving factor behind the dispersion of this information

is that few organisations are dedicated solely to reducing prescription medication misuse, dependence and addiction, but are funded to focus primarily on illicit drug and alcohol use.

People who misuse prescription medications have unique characteristics when compared with people who use illicit drugs, and may not have as much experience recognising the signs and symptoms of addiction. This necessitates the development of resources which are specifically designed to reach this cohort of Australians.

The success of organisations such as Beyond Blue in developing online spaces with user-friendly content, and opportunities to interact with other people affected and health professionals, signals a positive role for an interactive online hub. The absence of a national online hub to provide all Australians with the details required to begin treatment could be a significant barrier for those reaching out for help.

ScriptWise's website is already specifically designed for people potentially experiencing prescription medication issues. With the appropriate expansions, ScriptWise's website would provide a platform for individuals and their family members and/or carers to seek help and provide an ideal place to: integrate information seeking, discussion and early access to health professionals.

ScriptWise priority two

- collaborating to shape policy solutions that help improve Australians' quality of life such as the implementation of an effective real-time prescription monitoring system across Australia.

Proposed initiative three: lead a national advocacy campaign to promote the roll-out of a national, integrated and mandatory real-time prescription monitoring system to all States and Territories.

National mandatory real-time prescription monitoring would prevent many Australians from dying by ensuring their health professionals have access to the most up-to-date information regarding which potentially addictive medications they've been prescribed.

The Federal Government has already committed \$16 million to the roll-out of a national prescription monitoring system, however, there remains inconsistencies between varying States and/or territories to the type of system to be implemented.

With the availability of resources from the Federal Government, ScriptWise is best positioned as one of the 'go-to' organisations to unite all stakeholders within States and territories to deliver real change with the commitment of a real-time prescription monitoring system.

Proposed initiative four: update the National Pharmaceutical Drug Misuse Framework for Action (2012-2015) to ensure the implementation of more preventative strategies

The National Pharmaceutical Drug Misuse Framework for Action (2012-2015) urgently needs to be updated to include the priorities of the Governmental response to prescription medication misuse and addiction; it is now three years out of date. This Framework is underpinned by the principles of quality use of medicines which includes the use of evidence-based non-pharmacological alternate therapies.

Through our extensive network, ScriptWise is well-placed to hold national workshops across Australia to inform and provide comments on a revised version of the Framework. We will work closely with not only individuals who have been personally impacted by this issue, but also with Primary Health Networks (PHNs), local health services and non-government organisations to ensure that more comprehensive and effective preventative strategies are in place.

Further to this, ScriptWise is positioned to take the lead on two of the nine priority areas highlighted in this Framework: health information and other consumer responses, and treatment and reduction. These are the following activities outlined in the Framework that ScriptWise aims to undertake:

- Widen the acceptability of non-drug, non-opioid, non-benzodizepine treatments for physical an psychological problems
- Enhance the accessibility of information available to consumers regarding the potential harms associated with opioids and benzodiazepines, and
- Re-orientate existing services or develop new programs to address the needs of clients experiencing difficulties with problematic pharmaceutical use.

ScriptWise priority three

- conducting research to understand the costs associated with, underlying causes of, and potential solutions for, addressing misuse of prescription medications.

Proposed initiative five: conduct research into the cost of the prescription medication crisis on the community

While research has been undertaken to evaluate the cost of prescription medications on the Australian health care system in regards to specific pharmaceuticals such as codeine and Alprazolam, there has not been a comprehensive study of the financial burden of misuse and addiction to prescription medications on the Australian health system. This is further amplified by the rate of hospitalisations due to both opioid and benzodiazepine dependency as well as overdose rates (both fatal and non-fatal).

With current data old and/or sporadic, this proposed research report will provide decision-makers with a better understanding of the extent of the problem as well as to predict potential cost savings that could be gained if effective prevention policies and programs are in place. This report will provide a solid evidence base on which ScriptWise can advocate for all States and Territories to become part of a national, integrated and mandatory real-time prescription monitoring system.

While this piece of research has been completed prior to the implementation of SafeScript RTPM in Victoria, ScriptWise hopes to partner with Deloitte Economics to carry out projections on a national scale:

- The increasing financial burden of long-term use of opioid painkillers and benzodiazepines on the health system, and individuals
- The continued increase in prescribing of opioid painkillers and benzodiazepines
- The rate of hospitalisations due to opioid painkiller and benzodiazepines misuse, and fatality rates, and
- The trends regarding accessing treatment and psychosocial support for dependence

In America, aggregate costs for prescription opioid overdose, abuse, and dependence were estimated at over \$78.5 billion (in 2013 dollars), and total spending for health care and substance abuse was over \$28 billion, most of which (\$26 billion) was covered by insurance. This is further aggravated by costs for lost productivity, including reduced productive hours and lost productive for incarcerated individuals too.

Clearly, investment into research to understand the economic burden of this crisis can assist the Federal Government not understand the impact of the epidemic, but also to invest in preventative strategies.

Proposed initiative six: conduct research into overcoming stigma around seeking help and treatment options

The National Pharmaceutical Drug Misuse Framework for Action (2012-2015) highlighted the fact that there are

“currently a range of gaps in our understanding of the extent and nature of pharmaceutical drug misuse problems in Australia. This stems from the fact that this is a relatively recent phenomenon and consequently the monitoring and other processes required to focus on this problem are not well developed.”

Despite increasingly more reports regarding the scale of the problem, the gaps in knowledge around how to address the root causes of this epidemic are still very wide. The National Framework suggested the two areas which require more data collection and knowledge are the “patterns of pharmaceutical utilisation and harm” and focussed research dedicated to better informing policy.

Both of these avenues of research are worthy of more resources and would aid the development of public awareness campaigns and primary intervention methods which have the highest chance of success. For example, one area of study particularly pertinent to ScriptWise’s work is the ramifications of the stigma surrounding treatment for opioid dependence, and how to address it to improve health outcomes. A recent study by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, for example, found that Australians may opt for secrecy rather than seeking support due to the stigma around prescription opioid treatment. This research followed findings that the profile of people who use prescription medications may differ to that of the more well-known profile of people who use illicit drugs.

More research is therefore necessary to provide a more detailed profile of this community. This can be used as the basis for developing essential consumer information, outreach, targeted early-intervention strategies and treatment pathways. This can also be used to reduce hospital admissions and ambulance call-outs.

The US Department of Health and Human Services has taken a similar approach by including this key objective in its priority area of expanding Medication-assisted Treatment (MAT) to reduce opioid use disorders and overdose:

“Support research that informs effective use and dissemination of MAT and accelerates development of new addiction treatment medications”

The more knowledge gained regarding how to inform Australians about the available treatment options (such as MAT); the more likely the possibility of seeing a quicker reduction in the harms associated with addiction.

ScriptWise has previous experience conducting relevant national surveys regarding this issue. In 2016, ScriptWise launched a national survey to determine the underlying attitudes of Australians towards people who become addicted to prescription medications. The results of this survey helped kick-start discussion around the best ways to address this issue.

ScriptWise has also worked with the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre to integrate research findings with the experiences of those experiencing this issue first-hand in a public awareness campaign for International Overdose Awareness Day in 2017.

ScriptWise is therefore uniquely placed to work with relevant stakeholders to fill in the gaps and identify barriers which may be preventing Australians for getting the help they need.

Proposal Request

Activity	Timeframe	Full funding (ex GST)	Part-funding (ex GST)
<i>Initiative one:</i> Development of nationwide media campaign	Jan '19 to Dec '19	\$372,000	\$223,200
<i>Initiative two:</i> Development of a national online information network for Australians	Jul '18 to Apr '19	\$120,000	\$72,000
<i>Initiative three:</i> Lead a national RTPM campaign to all States and territories	Feb '19 to Jun '20	\$200,000	\$120,000
<i>Initiative four:</i> Update National Pharmaceutical Misuse Framework for Action	Jul '19 to Jul '20	\$280,000	\$168,000
<i>Initiative five:</i> Conduct research to understand the economic impact of the issue in Australia	Jul '18 to Jan '19	\$550,000	\$330,000
<i>Initiative six:</i> Conduct research to understand existing gaps in early intervention to treatment	Jul '19 to Jun '20	\$420,000	\$252,000
TOTAL		\$2,042,000	\$1,165,200

APPENDIX A

LIST OF SCRIPTWISE CURRENT STAKEHOLDERS

Organisation	State
M.O.V.E	National
Australian Digital Health Agency	National
Harm Reduction Australia	National
Painaustralia	National
Pharmaceutical Society of Australia	National
Western Victoria Primary Health Network	VIC
ORTicare	VIC
Ballarat Community Health	VIC
Wimmera Drug Action Taskforce	VIC
Grampians Community Health	VIC
Primary Care Connect/Hume Area Pharmacotherapy Network	VIC
Latrobe Community Health	VIC
Nexus Primary Health	VIC
ReConnexion	VIC
South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network	VIC
ACCESS Health/Medication Support Service	VIC
North West Melbourne Pharmacotherapy Network	VIC
Cohealth	VIC
Country Adelaide Primary Health Network	SA
Adelaide Primary Health Network	SA
Western Australia Primary Health Alliance	WA
Brisbane North Primary Health Network	QLD
South Western Sydney Primary Health Network	NSW
Sydney North Primary Health Network	NSW
Sydney Recovery	NSW

