

Response to question on notice

Questions on Notice Paper No 12

24 October 2025

Question No. 694

Peter Cain MLA: To ask the Minister for Health

1. Why are pharmacists in the ACT not currently authorised to initiate antiviral treatment for early-stage shingles, despite the condition being included in the ACT pharmacy minor ailments trial.
2. What clinical governance or safety concerns prevent pharmacists from autonomously prescribing antivirals for shingles, and how do these compare to the protocols used for other pharmacist-led treatments such as urinary tract infections and eczema.
3. How many ACT pharmacies are currently participating in the minor ailments trial that includes shingles, and what proportion of the ACT population has practical access to this service.
4. What metrics is the ACT Government using to evaluate the success of the pharmacy minor ailments trial and will these inform future expansion of pharmacist prescribing rights for shingles treatment.
5. What steps is the ACT Government taking to ensure timely and equitable access to early shingles treatment, particularly for patients who face barriers to accessing a general practitioner within the critical 72-hour treatment window.
6. Is the ACT Government considering legislative reform to expand pharmacist prescribing rights for antiviral medications; if so, what is the expected timeline for consultation and implementation.

RACHEL STEPHEN-SMITH MLA - The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

1. The ACT has been participating in NSW Health's clinical trial for expanded scope services by pharmacists. NSW Health enabled a small number of ACT pharmacies to participate in the trial to treat minor skin conditions, including shingles. The trial period concluded on 31 August 2025 and the Health and Community Services Directorate (HCSO) is awaiting the clinical trial outcomes from NSW Health.

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2. During the NSW Health clinical trial, pharmacies in the ACT were provided with a *Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 2008* licence (Other Licence category) to treat and provide medications for shingles and eczema autonomously. Pharmacies were required to provide these services according to the approved Practice Standards for each condition and in line with the clinical recommendation in the Therapeutic Guidelines. This differs from the treatment by pharmacists of uncomplicated urinary tract infection, which is protocol based, and also in line with the Therapeutic Guidelines.
3. Under the trial, NSW Health agreed for a limited number of ACT pharmacies to participate in the minor skin conditions phase. Eleven pharmacies were licenced by HCSD to deliver the services under clinical trial protocols. After the trial ended, the 11 pharmacies have had their licence extended to continue to treat minor skin conditions. These pharmacies were chosen to enable geographic spread across the ACT and includes access to all regions in the ACT.
4. NSW Health is working with its research partner, the University of Newcastle, to evaluate the outcomes of the minor skin conditions trial, and this data will be provided to HCSD when it has been published by NSW Health. The outcomes of the trial will inform further expansion of the minor skin conditions services by pharmacists.
5. As well as the pharmacies in the ACT who can assess and treat shingles, Canberra Health Services Walk-in Centres can assist and treat patients who suspect they may have shingles. In addition, many general practitioner practices in the ACT maintain several emergency appointments each day to assist patients with time-sensitive conditions including shingles.
6. The ACT Government recently announced an expansion of the pharmacist prescribing rights for minor skin conditions to align with the conditions pharmacists can treat in NSW. HCSD is progressing the regulatory mechanism to enable these services to be provided by any pharmacist who has completed the required training and has a closed consultation room. It is anticipated these changes will be in place by the end of the first quarter of 2026.

Approved for circulation to the Member and incorporation into Hansard.



Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA
Minister for Health

Date:

16 / 11 / 25

This response required 2hrs 10mins to complete, at an approximate cost of \$256.17.