



# Australia's unique medication scheduling system



**In Australia**, drugs and poisons are grouped together in Schedules that require similar regulatory controls over their availability. Our country's system is unique and allows for greater flexibility in the provision of medicines to the community, increasing accessibility and – in many cases – affordability.

Australia has the world's best system of community pharmacy. Medications that have been proven to be safe and effective are available to the Australian community at affordable prices. Doctors prescribe, pharmacists dispense medicines and advise on their uses and effects, and the Government subsidises the cost of a wide range of drugs under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

In Australia, medicines are grouped into 'Schedules' according to the appropriate level of control over access and availability required to protect public health and safety. This process is undertaken by the National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee (NDPSC).

Medicines are grouped into the following schedules:

**Schedule 2 (Pharmacy Medicine)** – Pharmaceuticals that can only be supplied through a pharmacy. This category is for substances for which the safe use may require advice from a pharmacist, and should therefore only be available from a pharmacy.

**Schedule 3 (Pharmacist Only Medicine)** – Pharmaceuticals which must be supplied by a pharmacist in a pharmacy. This category is for substances for which the safe use requires professional advice, but which should be available to the public without a prescription.

**Schedule 4 (Prescription Only Medicine)** – Medicines that can only be obtained with a prescription. This category is for substances for which the use or supply should be by or on the order of persons permitted by State or Territory legislation to prescribe (i.e. a doctor) and should only be available from a pharmacist on prescription.

**Schedule 8 (Controlled Drug)** – Drugs of addiction. This category is for substances that should be available for use but require restriction of manufacture, supply, distribution, possession and use to reduce abuse, misuse and physical or psychological dependence.

Inclusion of a drug or poison in a schedule indicates the degree of control required if it is marketed. It does not indicate:

- that the drug or poison is available; nor
- that it has been approved or is efficacious for any use that may be specified in a Schedule; nor
- negate any obligation for registration of a therapeutic good or an agricultural or veterinary chemical containing that drug or poison.

Advertising controls are included in all State and Territory Poisons Legislation for Schedule 4 and Schedule 8, as well as many Schedule 3 substances, except those Schedule 3 substances for which the NDPSC has supported advertising, as advertising of S3 substances is allowed on a case by case basis.

Pharmaceuticals are not ordinary items of commerce. They are not groceries to be self-selected and price promoted. Community pharmacists are able to provide expert professional advice about the use and effects of medications and are accountable for every piece of advice and service provided in their pharmacies. The quality use of medicines in Australia is dependent on pharmacists supplying medicines in a responsible manner.

For further information contact:

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia  
Phone: 02 6270 1888  
Fax: 02 6270 1800  
Email: [guild.nat@guild.org.au](mailto:guild.nat@guild.org.au)