



Australia's pharmaceutical wholesalers move to the global GS1 standards for their supply chain

Australia's Community Service Obligation (CSO) wholesalers – Symbion, Sigma, API and National Pharmacies – have set aside their competitive differences to implement global GS1 standards to help create a smarter, safer and more secure supply chain.

The CSO guarantees timely access to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medicines for all Australians, regardless of location. That means Australia's pharmacy wholesalers must deliver PBS medicines to the nearest pharmacy for patient collection – generally within 24 hours which is a significant task. This initiative – driven by the National Pharmaceutical Services Association (NPSA), which represents CSO wholesalers – will deliver a wide range of benefits for the medicines supply chain.

This is a multi-stage project, involving GS1 Identifiers, Barcodes, eCOM messages and the Global Data Synchronisation Network (GDSN).

The Challenge

The CSO wholesalers invest tens of millions of dollars in warehouse technology, systems and support to make Australia's supply chain as efficient and as secure as possible. However, while advances have been made, the approach to product identification, product data synchronisation, and electronic messaging has been fragmented as each organisation has been working independently.

There is a significant need to bring all efforts together and implement one approach throughout the supply chain via a uniform standard – GS1.

The move to global GS1 standards would bring Australia's pharmacy supply chain into line with international trends and advances in Australia's hospital supply chain system.



The Solution

In March 2014 at the Pharmacy Guild of Australia's Annual National Conference, APP, the wholesalers through the NPSA launched the Smarter Safer Secure initiative to promote the adoption of future technologies - end to end along the supply chain. This was the first step in the move to global GS1 standards.

Since March, the NPSA and wholesalers have been working with GS1 Australia to determine an implementation plan.

TOPIC	NOW	FUTURE	TIMING
Product identification	GTIN at 97% of medicines	GTIN at all levels of PBS medicine packaging	2014 -15
Product data/product form	Multiple entry points - no consistency	One standardised set of data through 1 repository GS1net	2014 -15
2D - GS1 barcodes and EPC / RFID	97% linear barcodes	Leverage international developments and assess use of new technologies	2015 ->
EDI (Electronic Data Interchange/eMessaging)	Inconsistent approach to formats and messaging	Documented industry solutions using GS1 standards	2015 ->
Recalls	Manual communications	Via GS1 Recallnet as an electronic solution	2015 ->

The Expected Outcomes

The benefits of this initiative are significant:

- **Enhanced supply chain security:** Through use of unique Global Trade Item Number (GTIN) identification encoded in GS1 barcodes, product identification will be more robust than ever before, safeguarding against counterfeiting, assisting with management of medicine shortfalls and enhancing the ability for recalls (through GS1 Recallnet).
- **Accessible data:** By ensuring consistent product data and unambiguous identification of products, the NPSA initiative will provide a single quality-controlled, paperless, data-rich environment for utilisation by suppliers, pharmacists and the consumers.
- **Patient-oriented:** Adoption of GS1 global standards end-to-end within the supply chain supports efficient scanning at the point of dispense. This will not only reduce errors but also enables pharmacists to record full medicine details - potentially including brand, batch expiry etc. - further unlocking the ability to load information into a patient record and assist in medication management.



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The Future

The NPSA and CSO wholesalers have a vision for the future where technology lead innovation and enhanced consumer interaction are commonplace and expected. All stakeholders understand how a single standardised approach will lay the foundations for these future goals.

With technologies fast advancing and patients becoming savvier and more information hungry, the NPSA and CSO wholesalers are keen to ensure that necessary data is accessible via the scan of a barcode using a smart device. Adoption of 2D barcodes and RFID technologies in the future will help to further improve medicine security and timeliness of recalls and medicine supply in cases of shortage or emergency.

The potential for developments is limitless – it could also extend to the reach of the pharmacists and how they can aid patients to manage medicines in their homes, and provide patients with more up to date information about their medicine interactions.

The **National Pharmaceutical Services Association (NPSA)** is the peak organisation representing pharmaceutical wholesalers in Australia. NPSA members guarantee timely access to PBS medicines for all Australians, regardless of where they live, under the Community Service Obligation (CSO) arrangements as part of the Fifth Community Pharmacy Agreement. For more information, please visit www.npsa.org.au.

