



PHARMACY MEDIA RELEASE
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RUM announces new consumer awareness campaign in 2017

In an effort to educate Australian consumers about responsibly disposing expired and unwanted medicines via their local pharmacy, the Return of Unwanted Medicines (RUM) Project will be commencing a national awareness campaign in June.

“We are really excited to be launching a new campaign later this year to alert people that this free and convenient service for returning unwanted medicines exists in the community,” said Toni Riley, Project Manager, RUM, and community pharmacist.

“Our upcoming campaign aims to highlight how storing expired or unwanted medicines in the home can be dangerous (or lead to unintended poisoning) and how inappropriate disposal of unwanted medicines can lead to environmental damage.”

According to a recent research study by Griffith University of over 4,300 Australians*, more than 60% had unwanted medicines in their home.

Worryingly, the majority of respondents (over 80%) did not know how to dispose of expired or unwanted medicines safely and appropriately and were completely unaware of the RUM initiative.

Lead researcher from the Griffith University study, Professor Amanda Wheeler, said the results of the national study are actually quite staggering.

“The majority of survey respondents (65%) said they disposed of their unwanted medicines with the usual household garbage; followed by poured down the drain or toilet (23.3%). Less than a quarter (23%) of those interviewed actually disposed of their unwanted medicines by returning them to a community pharmacy,” said Professor Wheeler.

“The good news however is that after learning about RUM, 92% of people surveyed said they would use the program to dispose of their unwanted medicines.”

The research study also provided recommendations for how community pharmacy can help drive awareness of RUM in their local area.

“We have a big job ahead of us to raise consumer awareness of RUM, and we are calling on the pharmacy industry to support our efforts. Every interaction with a pharmacy customer – especially at the dispensary counter – presents an opportunity to remind them to return their medicines back to the pharmacy, in the event it expires or is not used,” Ms Riley.

Mr Warwick Plunkett, Pharmacist, National Councillor of Pharmaceutical Society of Australia and Chair of the RUM Board, said since its inception in 1998, RUM has facilitated the collection and disposal of over 8 million tonnes of unwanted and expired medicines from the Australian community.



“In 2015-16, pharmacists collected well over 700,000kgs of unwanted medicines, which was an increase of 7.7% from 2014-15 collections. During this same year, almost 150,000 RUM bins were delivered to community pharmacies by the pharmacy wholesalers around Australia,” said Mr Plunkett.

“Although these figures are quite impressive and our audit confirms that pharmacy are using collection bins appropriately, RUM is still unfortunately underutilised in the community. The program is a critically important public health initiative, with the key objective of safeguarding the health of all Australians and the environment.

“We thank pharmacy for their role in facilitating collections and encourage them to be prepared for increased consumer interest about RUM and increased collection volumes of unwanted medicines once our consumer campaign kicks off,” continued Mr Plunkett.

RUM is a national, not-for-profit program funded by the Commonwealth Government to address safe disposal of medicines - a fundamental component of the Quality Use of Medicines (QUM). Community pharmacies collect these medicines at no cost to consumers, and pharmaceutical wholesalers provide support with delivery and collection of RUM bins, to and from pharmacies.

To place an order for a RUM bin, pharmacies should contact their pharmacy wholesaler.

RUM will be developing a ‘pharmacy toolkit’ and other resources designed to help pharmacies engage their local community about RUM. More information will be communicated in coming months.

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*The National Return and Disposal of Unwanted Medicines Project Audit 2016 was conducted by Griffith University and funded by RUM and Australian Government Department of Health. The research consisted of two stages, and was conducted from June to October 2016. The first stage involved an audit of a sample of returned medicines containers from all Australian states and territories. In total, representative samples of 423 Return of Unwanted Medicines (RUM) bins from all Australian states/territories. The second stage involved a two-step general population audit that consisted of a survey to assess awareness of the NatRUM scheme, and the risks associated with the improper disposal of unwanted medicines and accumulation of medicines, and structured interviews with higher medication users to identify perceptions and behaviours surrounding the disposal of unwanted medicines. There were 4302 adults from the Australian general population (including a sub-sample of 166 interview participants who were higher medication users) who participated in the research.