

# Return Unwanted Medicines



## MEDIA RELEASE

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## MILLIONS OF OLD MEDS IN AUSSIE HOMES POSE HEALTH HAZARD

New campaign urges Aussies to return unwanted medicines to pharmacy

To educate Australians of the dangers associated with storing expired and unwanted medicines in their home and drive awareness of how to dispose of medicines responsibly, **Return Unwanted Medicines** has partnered with **Channel 7 Sunrise presenter Natalie Barr** in a new campaign.

“It is estimated that there are millions of medicines sitting in Australian homes – either out-of-date or no longer needed. This poses a significant risk of accidental poisonings and medication mismanagement,” said Ms Barr.

According to the Australian Poisons Information Centres, more than 5,000 children end up in hospital due to medicine poisonings every year in Australia. Additionally, most accidental poisonings occur in children younger than five years old, with children aged one to three years being at the greatest risk.

“I was shocked when I heard the number of incidences of medicine poisonings in children and even more so when I found out some of these cases could have easily been prevented,” said Ms Barr.

“After learning about the potential dangers of storing unwanted medicines, I teamed up with Return Unwanted Medicines to help drive awareness of the issue and explain just how simple it is to return medicines you no longer need to your local pharmacy. This ensures that they are disposed of in a safe and environmentally-friendly way.”

Return Unwanted Medicines - or the RUM Project - is a Federal Government-funded initiative that provides all Australians with a free and convenient way to dispose of expired and unwanted household medicines. Anyone can return their medicines to any community pharmacy at any time, for safe collection and disposal.

A recent Griffith University study of over 4,300 Australians\* found more than 80% of people are completely unaware of the RUM Project and do not know how to dispose of unwanted medicines safely and appropriately.

“Last year alone, over 700 tonnes of medicines were collected and safely disposed of by the RUM Project, preventing it from ending up in waterways or landfill. If that’s only medicines collected from around 20% of the population, imagine how many more are hiding in bathroom cabinets and kitchen drawers across the country,” said Toni Riley, Project Manager, RUM, and community pharmacist.

The Griffith University study also revealed that most respondents (67%) said they disposed of unwanted medicines with the usual household garbage; followed by being poured down the drain or

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toilet (23.3%) and less than a quarter (23%) actually disposed of their medication by returning it to a pharmacy.

“By following three simple steps of **READ, REMOVE & RETURN**, Australians can minimise the risk of unintended poisonings and medication mix-ups, and do their bit to protect the environment,” continued Ms Riley.

Return Unwanted Medicines is urging Australians to follow 3 simple steps to a safer home and cleaner environment:

## READ

Go to your home medicine area. **READ** the labels of medicines, check the expiry dates and consider whether the medication is needed.

## REMOVE

**REMOVE** all expired and unwanted medicines and place them in a container or bag.

## RETURN

**RETURN** all expired and unwanted medicine to your local pharmacy. Your pharmacist will put your medicines in a secure bin for safe disposal.

For more information on Return Unwanted Medicines, visit [returnmed.com.au](http://returnmed.com.au) or talk to your local pharmacist.

**-Ends-**

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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.