



# National Australian Pharmacy Students' Association

## Connecting Tomorrow's Pharmacists

The Secretariat  
Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

### **Re: Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024**

Dear Secretariat,

The National Australian Pharmacy Students' Association (NAPSA) represents over 7,000 pharmacy students across 19 pharmacy schools in Australia, and consists of their 19 respective local pharmacy student associations. Our Association is student run and represents one of a few national health student bodies in Australia. Our submission is on behalf of all of our members, and we welcome the opportunity to provide the Committee with comments regarding the *Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024* (the bill).

NAPSA recognises the vital steps that the Albanese Government has taken to address the complex issues of poverty that many Australian students are confronted with. NAPSA supports Australian students studying to be a teacher, nurse, midwife or social worker to receive the Commonwealth Prac Payment (CPP), however our organisation recognises a clear need for the students covered by the CPP to be expanded. Students who undertake mandatory practical placements are often disadvantaged financially from the requirements that they place on their capacity to work and study. In the view of NAPSA it is essential that students undertaking placements can focus on enhancing and consolidating their clinical and practical skills and should be supported by the Government to do so.

The Albanese Government has identified cost of living as a key priority for all Australians. The bill before the Committee will provide financial relief for some but not all students undertaking mandatory placements. NAPSA continues to be concerned about reports which identify the pressures that students across Australia are facing financially. These pressures often result in students having to make financial decisions about supporting their studies or paying their rent, affording food and being able to complete a full practical rotation. NAPSA believes it is important to bring to the attention of the Committee that pharmacy students in Australia are struggling financially and their inclusion in the CPP is a necessity. We are also conscious of the fact that there are several other disciplines that have mandatory placement requirements, who should also be included in the CPP arrangement.

In the Explanatory Memorandum attached to the bill, it was noted that "placements come at a financial cost to students over-and-above standard costs of living", and that "these pressures are causing students to defer or withdraw from study which is impacting the pipeline of graduates entering the workforce in critical sectors". The Government in its own words understands the issues which students are confronting. Students who undertake placements, particularly in the allied health and health services industries are part of a workforce that is vital to the health and longevity of all Australians. Our integrated health system requires a workforce of skilled professionals. In pharmacy, placements ensure that



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theoretical understandings translate and consolidate into practical experience and that medication safety, best practice medication management and quality use of medicines are in the fundamental skill set of all graduate pharmacists.

NAPSA is very supportive of the approach in this bill to acknowledge and seek to address placement poverty. The Committee has an opportunity to recognise that this bold step is not bold enough and to recommend the expansion of the students who can access the CPP.

The current program will commence in July 2025 and excludes a vast cohort of multiple health disciplines, such as pharmacy and allied health students. These disciplines face the same issues as those identified in the Explanatory Memorandum, and many of our members are considering deferring or withdrawing from studies due to the financial burden of mandatory placements. Since the announcement of the CPP, NAPSA has maintained calls for this payment to be expanded.

The Committee must recognise that the toughest financial burdens often fall on students from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds. Our health discipline and allied health workforces need graduates from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds to provide the best support to all Australians. NAPSA recognises that students who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds approach their education through a lens of financial viability. The CPP arrangement, which will be means-tested, is a vital opportunity for the Government to provide much needed assistance to all students and to ensure a more diverse and equitable health workforce.

### **Amendment to the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* - Schedule 4**

NAPSA has reviewed the provisions in the bill and is supportive of the amendments proposed in Schedule 4. Our organisation is very pleased to see the Government addressing the issue of placement poverty and including a 15th item in the table at subsection 41–10(1) of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA)* to specify a new purpose for which grants can be paid. NAPSA recognises the Government's commitment to support students studying teaching, nursing, midwifery or social work and continues to advocate for students in these groups being supported by the CPP. NAPSA calls on the Committee to recommend the expansion of this group of students to include pharmacy students and students of other health disciplines, who are also suffering from placement poverty. The pathway of students to graduates must not be disrupted by financial pressures when the Government has proposed the means to alleviate this issue.

A national survey of NAPSA members identified that 84% have been forced to take unpaid leave from employment in order to undertake their mandatory placements. Furthermore, 86% experienced financial hardship due to mandatory placements, with 56% foregoing meals due to that financial hardship. The bill before the Committee presents an opportunity to support pharmacy students undertaking mandatory placements as part of their studies and will have a measurable and achievable goal of reducing placement poverty.

NAPSA is proud to support students from across Australia, in regional and metropolitan areas, students who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically



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diverse, students living with disabilities and mental illness, and who are the first in their family to attend university. Across all these backgrounds and experiences our members have identified the financial pressure of unpaid mandatory placements as a major concern during their studies. NAPSA is aware that students from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack access to networks of support that can assist them during financial stress caused by placements. The CPP will help address this problem and will aid in preventing these students from exiting studying and leaving our profession and future workforce.

All future health professionals in Australia, including pharmacists are trained to provide the best quality care for marginalised and disadvantaged communities. Pharmacists work in regional and remote communities to ensure that people across Australia are able to access the medicines they need to live happy and healthy lives. Most Australians will receive care, support or advice from a pharmacist or pharmacy student in their lives. It was reported in 2021 that a person, on average, will visit a pharmacy 18 times a year. On this Committee, members would have gone to a pharmacy at some point in their lives. It is unfair that students working in placements in these pharmacies may be doing so without any financial support. Our members need the support that this bill can provide and we seek the support of the Committee in this goal. Our future workforce will be enhanced by the expansion of the CPP and ensure that our healthcare professions have clear pipelines of graduates to provide essential health care across Australia.

The bill gives the Government the power to make these changes to the application of Schedule 4. With the support of the Committee we can continue to call on the Government to support students in Australia.

Our team who prepared this submission are pharmacy students about to go on their respective placements who would greatly benefit from the financial support proposed in this bill.

NAPSA is happy to provide more information as required.

Yours faithfully,

Sebastian Harper  
**National President**  
**National Australian Pharmacy Students' Association**