

Opinion Piece



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When is a medicine not a medicine?

When it's a Complementary Medicine! The Complementary Healthcare Council of Australia (CHC) emphasizes the distinct difference between complementary medicines and pharmaceutical drugs, and the need for a clear regulatory system that reflects this. Something is not right when regulators increasingly opt to assess complementary medicines against medical criteria – in much the same way as pharmaceutical drugs are assessed.

While the complementary medicines Industry appreciates and respects the role of effective regulation in the interests of public health, the current form of regulation in Australia is at risk of suffocating an important industry.

Consumer demand for complementary medicines is ever growing. Australian consumers are a savvy lot, who support innovation, but also tradition. Most of all, Australian consumers like to be the ones in control, especially when it comes to their health. The facts speak for themselves – not only do three in every four consumers in the country use complementary medicines, they can name the exact complementary medicine they take and why they take it.

Complementary medicines differ from pharmaceutical drugs, and as such, should be regulated differently. They have never claimed to be a medical solution to a medical problem; rather, they look at how to assist the overall 'wellness' of consumers to help improve daily lives and help prevent us all from falling sick (or at least reducing the duration) by maintaining a healthy balance.

The practical effect of the current regulatory framework is overly complicated, complex and unclear legislation with little or no public health benefit. What it has done, though, is cause significant financial impact on businesses and is reducing competitiveness in the sector as new and small players either avoid entry into, or leave altogether, the Australian market.

Not all is lost, though. The complementary medicine industry, through the CHC, is committed to working closely with the Therapeutic Goods Administration to improve the regulatory framework and compliance arrangements, *but we* believe the regulations applied cannot be a 'one size fits all' medicines model. They have to be appropriate to the level of risk associated with the products *and* conducive to enabling the Industry to provide the products that Australian consumers demand.

Given there are currently over 150 regulations that must be complied with, spread across at least 16 different guideline documents, proper alignment will be no small feat and it cannot be done in haste. It is a work in progress – one that will continue with a better and clearer understanding of the beneficial role complementary medicines play in the daily lives of consumers.

The Complementary Healthcare Council of Australia (CHC)

The CHC is the leading Australian industry body committed to a vital and sustainable complementary healthcare products industry. We believe in a holistic healthcare model based on promoting long-term wellness of the community. We are the principle reference source for government, industry and consumers regarding issues relating to the complementary healthcare industry including complementary medicines.

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We represent complementary healthcare industry stakeholder groups such as importers, exporters, manufacturers, raw material suppliers, wholesalers, distributors, retailers, practitioners, consultants, marketers and consumers.

What are complementary medicines and natural healthcare products?

Complementary medicines and natural healthcare products cover a diverse range of products including vitamins, mineral and nutritional supplements, special purpose foods, herbal and homoeopathic medicines, aromatherapy products and natural cosmetics.

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