

# Media Release



**19 September 2013**

## **CHC says “Prognosis poor” on the diagnosis of NHMRC Complementary Medicine Clinician Resource**

The Complementary Healthcare Council of Australia (CHC) commends the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) for drafting resources that encourage health professionals to communicate openly with patients about their use of complementary medicines. However, the CHC is disappointed that aspects of the resources provide little support for health professionals to guide patients with accurate and relevant information.

Mr Carl Gibson, Chief Executive Officer of the CHC said, “I am afraid the prognosis is poor on the diagnosis of the NHMRC resources on complementary medicines. The CHC supports the position that consumers should make informed and evidence based decisions about their health, but we are concerned that there is an unrealistic expectation for consumers to accept the burden of seeking and reviewing scientific evidence.”

“The CHC acknowledges the aim of the clinical resources is about encouraging open dialogue between the health professional and patients to ensure patient disclosure about their use of complementary medicines. It is important that health professionals are aware of all medicines, including complementary medicines, their patient may be taking. Unfortunately, patients don’t always tell their doctor about the complementary medicines they are taking because they are concerned that it will be met with disapproval. An open and respectful approach may go some way to encouraging patients to speak with clinicians about their use of complementary medicines.”

“Two out of every three Australians use complementary medicines and the majority of consumers can name the exact complementary medicine that they purchase and why<sup>1</sup>. Clinicians should be encouraged to become familiar with potential benefits and risks associated with those complementary medicines most commonly used by patients, and to refer to a resource when they are uncertain about safety issues,” added Mr Gibson.

The CHC believes that clinicians should be encouraged to acknowledge the reasons consumers may seek complementary medicines. These can include the cost prohibitive nature of some conventional medicines or their association with significant side effects. Even so, the CHC considers it misplaced to consider that consumers may be using complementary medicines in place of proven effective conventional medicine; Australian consumers understand complementary medicines are not a replacement and that rather they can work hand in hand with prescription medications.

In addition, the CHC believes that the clinical resource developed by NHMRC should also consider that Traditional medicines are based on an extensive history of use, often measured over thousands of years. The use of these medicines is becoming more widespread in developed countries, with their safe and effective use supported by a strong foundation of both traditional and scientific evidence.

The CHC is the principal reference point for industry, government, media and consumers to communicate balanced information relating to complementary medicines and as such would be interested in assisting with the dissemination of information to clinicians about evidence, effectiveness and potential risks of complementary medicines.

Please find a link to the CHC Submission to the [NHMRC on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Resources for Clinicians](#).

<sup>1</sup> CHC Complementary Medicines Industry Audit May 2011

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