

# Fight for pharmacy continues



Pharmacist Rhonda Warne, pictured at her pharmacy in Griffith, is trying to get approval for a new pharmacy in Hackett.

Picture: Daniel Spellman.

By Joni Scanlon

A NON-APPROVED pharmacy will soon open in Hackett as part of a continued community push to secure services in the suburb.

Despite not gaining government support for a Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme pharmacy, pharmacist Rhonda Warne has confirmed she will open the pharmacy in a limited capacity while she reapplies for a PBS number.

The non PBS approved pharmacy will still be able to meet some of the needs of the community, despite customers not being able to access the scheme.

"Essentially the pharmacy will dispense prescriptions at a private rate," Ms Warne said. "I will be able to dispense medication. I will be able to give advice and give the community a sort of feeling of what it's like to have a real pharmacy in the community."

The pharmacy will essentially operate as a 'private' pharmacy offering a full range of medication without concessions.

"People can't access the PBS, so all the people that really need the pharmacy in Hackett are the people more than likely on concession medication or pension medication or veterans' affairs medication," Ms Warne said.

"This will adversely affect those on pensions, concessions or repatriation pensions as I will not be able to dispense those at a subsidised rate.

"Also prescriptions dispensed don't count towards the pharmacy safety net."

While Ms Warne said operating under these conditions was not ideal, it was the only option given Minister for Health and Ageing Tanya Plibersek had refused to grant a PBS pharmacy for Hackett in May.

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HACKETT is unable to qualify for a pharmacy under a Federal Government Pharmacy Agreement, which rules that a pharmacy cannot open within 1.5 kilometres of another pharmacy. The nearest pharmacy to the proposed Hackett site is 1.345 kilometres away in Watson.

Despite this, Ms Warne and the Hackett community are continuing to fight for the pharmacy. On July 23, more than 70 people attended a community meeting to discuss what can be done to secure a PBS pharmacy at Hackett shops.

Organised by the Hackett Community Association, president Greg Haughey said the meeting was a success and he was heartened by the continuing support for a pharmacy.

"There are a lot of unanswered questions and ambiguity in the responses we have received from the Minister and her department," he said. "The meeting gave us a chance to air some of those discrepancies and plan the way forward."

Ms Warne shared a Statement of Reasons from the Department of Health for the rejection, along with a Freedom of Information document outlining how the department came to their decision, at the meeting. She was concerned the department hadn't considered the demographics of the area in the process.

"I hoped the government would have taken into consideration that Hackett has one of the oldest populations per square kilometres on the northside of Canberra and is also



Rhonda Warne and Hackett residents at the proposed site. Picture: Elesia Lee

lacking any public transport to the closest pharmacy, which is Watson," she said. "Instead I received a ridiculous response suggesting that Hackett residents had myriad pharmacies to choose from on the northside including Campbell and Mitchell – I mean really, if residents have trouble getting to Watson, Ainslie and Dickson, I can't see how Campbell and Mitchell are more accessible."

Federal Member for Fraser and Hackett resident Andrew Leigh has thrown his support behind the campaign and said he was hopeful it would be approved this time around.

"Many Hackett residents want a pharmacy, and the population growth in North Watson means that the opening of a Hackett pharmacy need not undercut the viability of the Watson pharmacy," Dr Leigh said.

"The pharmacy rules look at the

distance 'as the crow flies', but I've never met a Hackett resident who goes by crow to pick up their medications."

Greens Caroline Le Couteur and Shane Rattenbury showed their support at the meeting, as well as Labor candidate for Molonglo Angie Drake.

Ms Le Couteur is a supporter of the proposed pharmacy and believes it will work well in the aging area. She expressed her concern that the federal laws could not be easily applied in Canberra due to Territory laws that limited commercial areas.

"Local planning rules and federal planning rules seem to be leading to a poor result," she said.

The meeting endorsed Ms Warne's proposal and agreed to continue petitioning the Minister for Health and Aging, who has the power to override the location rules.