

Working with medicines

# Medical Practitioners

## Regulations

Medical practitioners, registered with the national board, have various authorities under the Medicines and Poisons Regulations 2016 to purchase, hold and use prescription medicines.

## Authority

The following table outlines the authority of medical practitioners to use medicines under the Regulations:

| **Practitioner** | **Type of Authority** |
| --- | --- |
| **Obtain (purchase)** | **Possess** | **Administer** | **Supply** | **Prescribe** |
| Medical practitioner  | 🗸 | 🗸 | 🗸 | 🗸 | 🗸 |

Any authority is limited to the lawful practice of the professional and includes:

* within scope of practice / general professional limitations;
* for patients under the care of the health practitioner;
* at usual place of business or patient’s place of residence (for home visits);
* in the course of operating the practitioner’s business / as part of employment; and
* any relevant restrictions or conditions imposed on the individual practitioner.

## Purchasing medicines

Medical practitioners may purchase medicines in their own name, for the treatment of patients under their care. A Permit is required to purchase medicines in name of a business, or where inventory will be shared between multiple medical practitioners.

## Supply and prescription

Medical practitioners may personally prescribe or supply a Schedule 4 (S4) or Schedule 8 (S8) medicine in accordance with their authority. Any medicine supplied must be appropriately packaged and fully labelled according to regulations.

A medical practitioner may personally direct another authorised health practitioner (e.g. registered nurse) to administer a S4 or S8 medicine. Direction may be written or verbal, and provided through electronic or telephone means. The details of any direction issued must however, be recorded in writing, in the patient’s clinical record, within 24 hours of being given. In a hospital, this direction is to be recorded on an approved medication chart.

A medical practitioner may issue a Structured Administration and Supply Arrangement (SASA) that permits another authorised health practitioner under their employment, to supply or administer a S4 medicine, for acute treatment or public health. Usual Regulations for packaging, labelling, storage and recording of S4 medicines continue to apply in full.

Medical practitioners may prescribe S8 medicines which meet the criteria of the *Schedule 8 Medicines Prescribing Code*. Schedule 8 prescribing that does not meet the criteria of the Code (very high dose, off-label, etc) requires the prior written approval of the Department of Health.

Specific approvals are required to prescribe opioid pharmacotherapy for the treatment of dependence, stimulants and cannabis-based products. Medical practitioners should be aware of the obligations of prescribers in relation to drug dependent and oversupplied persons.

## Storage

S4 medicines must be stored in a locked storage facility to prevent unauthorised access. For example: a lockable room, cupboard, cabinet or refrigerator. Precautions must be taken to ensure keys are not accessible to unauthorised staff.

S8 medicines must be stored in a locked purpose-built drug safe. Storage of a total of S8 medicines less than of 250 doses requires a small safe and greater than 500 doses requires a large safe. Motion detectors covering the safe are required when more than 250 doses are stored.

If treating patients outside of a medical practice, medicines must remain in the possession of the authorised practitioner at all times and all reasonable steps must be taken to prevent their loss or theft. The quantity held must be the minimum required to treat patients.

## Recording

Medical practitioners must make accurate clinical records of all medicines administered or supplied and retain these for at least 2 years for S4 medicines, or 5 years for S8 medicines. All records must be available to be produced if demanded by an authorised officer of the Department of Health.

A register of transactions, kept in an approved manner and form, must be maintained for all incoming and outgoing S8 medicines. A monthly inventory must be also performed.

When S8 medicines are supplied (as distinct from being administered), a summary record of S8 medicines supplied for the month must be forwarded to the Department of Health, before the seventh day of the following month.

## Compliance assessment

Medical practices and medical practitioners may be required to participate in routine audit assessments to monitor compliance with these requirements. Non-compliance with the Regulations may result in regulatory actions such as restrictions or loss of medicines authorities, notification to the Medical Board of Australia, and/or prosecution under the legislation.

## More information

For more information contact the Medicines and Poisons Regulation Branch on:

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