Could pharmacies be the missing link between Consumer Health Organisations and health consumers?

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In 2007-2008, 75% of Australians reported having a chronic disease.¹ The cost of treating this large proportion of the population is substantial. Estimates from 2011 indicate that treatment of cardiovascular disease alone cost the Australian health system $11.5 billion.² Looking beyond the dollar figure how much is it costing individuals? Chronic disease is not only expensive, but it significantly reduces the quality of life for those who are living with such conditions. Traditionally, healthcare has focused primarily on a biomedical model which emphasises treating a particular illness or alleviation of immediate physical symptoms. While this approach addresses the dominant clinical elements of chronic disease, it does not always account for the other aspects of treatment burden such as side effects (e.g. hair loss from chemotherapy), physical limitations (e.g. immobility), psychological impacts (e.g. depression, isolation), or substantial financial impacts. This highlights the need for a more holistic, patient-centred approach to care where the consumer is treated as a whole person, not just as a sufferer of a certain disease.

What are Consumer Health Organisations?

The term Consumer Health Organisations (CHOs) encompasses an array of health consumer supports which exist through; not-for-profit groups (e.g. Multiple Sclerosis Australia), federal and state government run initiatives (e.g. HACC- Home and Community Care), community groups (e.g. Asperger's & Autism Support group), charity services (e.g. St Vincent de Pauls Society), all of which provide a broad range of additional supports, which can be overlooked during a typical interaction with health professionals. Programs offered by CHO's can improve the quality of life of those living with a chronic disease by providing support beyond what primary healthcare typically involves.
Figure 1. Types of burden experienced by health consumers and the assistance available to health consumers through CHOs and support services.

How do they help?
The type of support provided varies greatly and caters for an array of consumer or carer needs (Figure 1). Assistance is provided to address the broad range of challenges experienced when living with or caring for someone who has a chronic disease or disability. Some of this assistance is focused on specific therapeutic conditions (e.g. asthma, diabetes) when run through CHOs such as Asthma Australia, or Diabetes Australia. This can include the latest information regarding the condition, emerging treatments, practical advice on how to self manage, as well as psychological support through sharing experiences with other consumers. Some other CHOs offer support services that provide broader assistance for other aspects of
life including financial assistance, telephone counselling, home maintenance, carer respite days through to transport alternatives (Table 1: Pharmacy Resource).

The missing link!

CHOs have much to offer health consumers that could alleviate a significant amount of day-to-day difficulties they are experiencing, yet some of these services are reportedly underutilised. If consumers remain largely unaware of such organisations and programs, unsure of where they can be found or unable to select the most appropriate program for them, then it is likely that people will continue to miss out and persevere with these additional, avoidable stresses.

So what can pharmacists and pharmacy staff do?

Traditionally pharmacies have supplied medicines and provided advice for health consumers managing chronic conditions. This role has expanded to include extra services such as blood pressure monitoring and home medication reviews. As many consumers and carers visit the pharmacy on a monthly basis this provides an opportunity for community pharmacy staff to further support consumers, by referring them to CHO’s or by bringing these CHO support programs to their attention. Consumers have stated how approachable pharmacy assistants are and they are often considered the face of community pharmacy since they can be the main person a customer interacts with. Therefore, it is important to consider referring customers on to CHO support services next time you’re assisting them – by doing this you’ll be further evolving the role community pharmacy plays in caring for customers and you may make the world of difference to their quality of life.

A Pharmacy Resource

Table 1: Pharmacy Resource has been developed to inform pharmacists and pharmacy staff about some of the key organisations and extra services that are available to health consumers via CHO’s. This resource gives a glimpse into the broad array of services that are currently out there to assist those affected by a chronic disease and demonstrates how many different elements of burden that result from a chronic disease can be improved through CHO support. While this is not an exhaustive list of consumer supports groups and programs, it does highlight some key organisations for disease-specific groups as well as other programs or schemes that are run for consumers living with a disability or chronic disease, or for the people who care for them.
CHO support has been categorised into services or programs for disease-specific groups, carers, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) peoples and other living assistance and information services. In addition there are some state specific health directories noted at the bottom and the national and state based organisations that offer more disease-specific programs. The resource shows the wide range of services and programs provided both across and within organisations. For example the Cancer Council offers different levels of service to accommodate individuals at any stage of their diagnosis. This includes telephone counselling for the newly diagnosed, guidance on how to break the news to family and friends, advice on choosing the right treatment, tips for managing side effects and impacts of the cancer (e.g. the Wig and Turban service for those who experience hair loss), a peer support program that is offered to comfort those who feel isolated since their diagnosis (i.e. Cancer Connect), and even an avenue for survivors of cancer to share their experiences (Walk for Life). Additionally, separate organisations exist for specific cancer types and provide alternative services designed to accommodate for the different challenges those diagnosed may face, for example, breast cancer sufferers may require a different type of support to men diagnosed with prostate cancer. This type of multifaceted support is not exclusive to those living with cancer, equivalent support is accessible for all types of diseases, such as multiple sclerosis, asthma, Parkinson’s disease and arthritis to name a few.

In addition to this tailored disease-specific support, there are also services and organisations which aim to alleviate some of the burden which most people living with chronic diseases will experience, for example, local transport services (e.g. patient assisted travel scheme), financial support (e.g. No Interest Loan Scheme), and medical equipment hire; in fact most other requirements have been addressed in some way. Conversely the integral support that carers provide to people living with chronic diseases or disabilities does not go unrecognised. There is a large support network for carers; offering practical advice, transport concessions, respite services and most importantly emotional and social supports. Currently, state health departments have referral and advice services in place, through hotlines (i.e. Health Direct Hotline) and websites (Table 1). It is intended that this Resource aids the exposure of the public to these extra support service, by providing pharmacies with a valuable starting point for the referral of consumers to CHOs, and potentially make a significant difference to individuals coping with a chronic disease.
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References

**PHARMACY RESOURCE FOR CHRONIC ILLNESS**

### ASTHMA & RESPIRATORY

**Asthma Foundation**
*National & All States*
- Visit the Foundation at www.asthmafoundation.org.au
- Provides educational information for asthma, including treatment, management and education services.
- Phone 1800 052 222

**Wells for People**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources to people living with asthma, including information on smoking cessation, medication support, and support services.
- Phone 1800 242 141

**National Children’s Program**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for children and young people living with asthma, including educational programs and support services.
- Phone 1800 011 041

### ARTHRITIS & MUSCULOSKELETAL

**Arthritis Australia**
*National & All States*
- Provides information and resources for people living with arthritis, including education, support services, and links to arthritis-related organisations.
- Phone 1800 242 141

**Challenging Arthritis**
*South Australia*
- Provides education and resources for people living with arthritis, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 08 8362 3696

**Managing Arthritis**
*New South Wales*
- Provides support and resources for people living with arthritis, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 052 222

**Osteoarthritis of the Knee (OAK)**
*New South Wales*
- Provides information and resources for people living with osteoarthritis, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 827 333

**Bone Sarcoma Program**
*New South Wales*
- Provides support and resources for people living with bone sarcoma, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 242 141

### CANCER

**Cancer Council Australia**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with cancer, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 011 041

**State Cancer Councils**

- **Federal Government**
  - National
  - Phone 1800 622 622

- **National Health**
  - National
  - Phone 1800 011 041

**Cancer Related Hotline**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with cancer, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 011 041

### CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE, KIDNEY & LIVER DISEASE

**National Heart Foundation**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with heart disease, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 052 222

**National Stroke Foundation**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with stroke, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 810 334

**National Kidney Foundation**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with kidney disease, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 011 041

### CHRONIC ILLNESS ALLIANCE

**Australian Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS)**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with chronic illness, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 052 222

### MENTAL HEALTH, NEUROLOGICAL, DEVELOPMENTAL & OTHER

**Beyond Blue**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with mental illness, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 355 454

**AMWA Australia**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with mental illness, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 355 454

**Mental Health Foundation of Australia**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with mental illness, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 355 454

**Parkinson’s Australia**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with Parkinson’s disease, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 088 604

**Alzheimer’s & Autism Support Group**
*New South Wales*
- Provides support and resources for people living with Alzheimer’s disease, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 100 160

**State and Territory**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with mental illness, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 355 454

### CAREGIVER SUPPORT

**Caregiver Support**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with chronic illness, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 052 222

### CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE

**Health Direct**
*1800 022 222*
- Provides support and resources for people living with chronic illness, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 022 222

**National Stroke Foundation**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with stroke, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 810 334

### LIVING ASSISTANCE

**Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with chronic illness, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 052 222

**Cancer Councils**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with cancer, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 011 041

### ADDITIONAL CONSUMER INFORMATION

**National Prescribing Service**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with chronic illness, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 409 409

**Australian Health Care**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with chronic illness, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 919 919

**State Government**
*National & All States*
- Provides support and resources for people living with chronic illness, including information on pain management and support services.
- Phone 1800 052 222

*The national organisations can provide contacts, factsheets, resources and other information related to chronic illness.**

**Specific programs service areas differ. Check the contact details for more information.**

**These programs are able to be utilised for a range of adult cancers.**