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A hard-fought win to save the local pharmacies, says Gavin Pearce

I wholeheartedly support access to cheaper medicines, but it should never come at the expense of our community pharmacists who play such a crucial role in the provision of primary healthcare right across the North-West, West Coast and King Island.

That's why, for months, I've been representing local pharmacists in Canberra who say that they were not adequately consulted by the Labor government before they announced their new 60-day dispensing policy, risking the very viability of pharmacies across our region and the nation.

Quite rightly, pharmacists are very highly regarded members of local communities, and for this government to totally dismiss consultation and force a measure on them that would potentially see thousands of job losses was inconceivable.

This rushed policy had the potential for significant consequences, particularly in rural and regional communities like ours where the local pharmacist is often the only primary healthcare professional in town.

Getting it wrong could have forced up healthcare costs for the most vulnerable Australians and reduced access to critical services and advice.

The pharmacists told me that the resolution was simple: get back to the table with the sector and negotiate an Eighth Community Pharmacy Agreement to resolve their legitimate concerns regarding 60-day dispensing.

For months the Albanese government refused to budge, until now.

In a win for common sense, the government has now admitted their error and brought forward the start date of the new agreement, immediately commencing negotiations with the sector.

My focus is always on representing the legitimate concerns of my region and, if left unchecked, this unconsulted, unmodelled and rushed policy would have had serious impacts on our crucial pharmacy sector - who are always there, day-in-day-out, supporting their local communities through the good and bad times.

When Labor announced this policy, all they achieved was to pit one vital healthcare sector against another, and this was shameful and naive because the solution could have always been a win-win.

Our pharmacists knew that; I knew that; everyone seemed to know that except the Albanese government.

I'm proud to fight for patients, pharmacists and communities, and I now implore the Albanese government to do the right thing and enter into the upcoming negotiations in good faith.

I'll never stop fighting for my community and for what's right.

ENDS