

# Pharmacy Assistants Take Concerns to PM

More than 90 pharmacy assistants and women pharmacists from right around the country attended a morning tea with Prime Minister John Howard at Parliament House Canberra late last month.

The pharmacy representatives met with the Prime Minister to express their concerns about Woolworths Ltd's request to open pharmacies in supermarkets.



*Pharmacy assistants await the Prime Minister's arrival.*



*Simone Fielding takes her pharmacy colleagues' concerns straight to Mr Howard.*

If Woolworths Ltd were permitted to open pharmacies, the retailer has clearly stated its intention not to employ what they describe as 'inefficient' staff such as the hardworking pharmacy representatives that travelled to the nation's capital.

Therefore, pharmacy assistants in attendance were keen to articulate to the Prime Minister their anger at the Government's failure to categorically rule out the idea of supermarket pharmacy ownership.

Simone Fielding from V Pharmacy in Smithfield, Cairns, spoke on behalf of all pharmacy assistants about their concerns for the future of the pharmacy industry and for their livelihood with the continued threat of deregulation.

Ms Fielding also pointed out that pharmacy assistants viewed themselves as healthcare professionals, not just shop assistants, with many of her colleagues in attendance holding nationally recognised qualifications in community pharmacy, and some even holding tertiary qualifications.

Mr Howard noted these concerns, and reiterated that he had always supported community pharmacy, and indeed small business, having come from a small business background himself.

However, he towed the Government's line in saying the Fourth Agreement would have to reflect and fairly represent the needs of all stakeholders, including taxpayers, and that they were endeavouring to achieve this.

Whilst it was pleasing that Mr Howard's comments echoed empathy and were supportive to a degree, he would not be drawn into a more substantial commitment to

ruling out a 'Woolworths trial'.

The Prime Minister also presented the National GSK Pharmacy Assistant of the Year award to Queensland pharmacy assistant Karen Hannah and walked amongst the crowd of pharmacy employees, chatting and pausing for photographs with many pharmacy assistants as they continued to convey their concerns.



*The Prime Minister mingles with pharmacy assistants at the event.*

Queensland Branch Committee Member Karen Peachey also attended the event, and said it was great to see so many pharmacists were willing to allow their staff to attend to make a strong statement to Prime Minister Howard and the Government, particularly with the end of financial year pressures so close.

"I hope these pharmacists and all Guild members understand this event sent a powerful message to the Prime Minister at a critical time in the negotiations, hopefully impacting positively on the eventual outcome," she said.

The Guild would like to sincerely thank those members who nominated their assistants to attend the event.



*Our representatives (L to R): Elisha Kovacich (Ayr), Tracey Hogan (Bundaberg), Joanne Green (Gympie), Simone Fielding (Smithfield), Karen Hannah, Veronica Allinson (Brisbane) and Queensland Branch Committee Member Karen Peachey.*