

Primary Schools Stretched Thin by Rising Demand to Manage Student Medications

Australia's primary schools are carrying an increasing, and often invisible responsibility: managing the safe administration of student medications.

From ADHD medication to insulin and emergency treatments for chronic conditions, principals report that the demands have grown significantly in both volume and complexity. Yet schools have been left without the medical expertise or resources to manage these needs safely.

"Teachers and leaders come into this profession to educate children. But increasingly, they are also being asked to act as health professionals, without staffing support, funding or the training that requires," said Angela Falkenberg, President of the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA).

Key challenges faced by schools include:

- **Staff burden:** Principals, deputies, teachers and office staff are frequently pulled away from core duties to administer medication, sometimes multiple times a day.
- **Lack of medical expertise:** Most primary schools have no access to a school nurse. Untrained staff are left managing high-risk medications, often under significant stress.
- **Growing demand:** More students require medication during the school day, with complex needs such as diabetes, epilepsy and ADHD adding to the workload.
- **Parental pressures:** Schools must ensure compliance with medical plans and follow up on expired or missing medications, creating tension with families.
- **Legal and safety risks:** Staff worry about errors or liability, particularly on excursions and camps where risks are amplified.

Principals agree - this is not sustainable.

"The wellbeing of students must always come first. But when staff are spending increasing time and emotional energy on medication management, the whole school community feels the impact. It takes away from learning, leadership and the support schools can give every child," Ms Falkenberg said.

APPA is calling for dedicated funding and staffing for primary schools to access trained health professionals who can safely manage medication and relieve the growing pressure on teachers and leaders.

"Schools should not be expected to run mini-clinics," Falkenberg said. *"This is about student safety, staff wellbeing, and the sustainability of our education system. We need immediate action to protect our school communities."*

MEDIA RELEASE

“Schools are committed to supporting children’s health needs. But this must be a shared responsibility with health and education systems working hand in hand. Without change, the risks to student safety and staff wellbeing will only continue to grow.”

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APPA is the ‘national voice for Australian primary principals’, representing over 7,600 primary school leaders across Australia.

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