From 1 January 2009, couples living apart due to illness will be able to use the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) Safety Net jointly.

How does the PBS Safety Net work?
Payments for PBS medicines can be tallied for an individual, or jointly for couples and families, towards the Safety Net threshold. When the threshold is reached, Safety Net benefits apply and a Safety Net card can be issued for the person, or members of the couple or family.

What are the changes for couples separated by illness?
For PBS Safety Net purposes, a person and their partner are usually required to be living together permanently in order to use the Safety Net jointly as a couple.

The changes enable the members of a couple who are living apart due to illness or infirmity to access the same Safety Net benefits as would apply if living together.

This means being able to combine PBS payments towards the same Safety Net threshold and be included on the same Safety Net concession or entitlement card. After the threshold is reached, PBS medicines required by either partner can be obtained at the reduced Safety Net rate for the rest of the calendar year.

The changes apply to married couples and to de facto same-sex or opposite-sex partners living separately due to illness.

How is a couple defined for Safety Net purposes?
For the PBS Safety Net, a couple is:
- a person, and
- a legally married or de facto partner of the same or opposite gender.

A de facto relationship is one where the relationship is registered on a State or Territory register or where the partners are living together as a couple on a genuine domestic basis.

What does ‘separated by illness’ mean?
This means that a couple is living apart due to illness, infirmity or frailty (eg. for nursing care or in a residential or aged care facility), and would otherwise be eligible to use the Safety Net jointly when living together.

To be eligible as a PBS Safety Net family when living apart due to illness, de facto partners must have been living together on a permanent basis prior to living apart.

Will the changes also apply to the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS)?
Yes. The new Safety Net arrangements also apply for veterans accessing pharmaceutical benefits under the RPBS.

For more information on the PBS Safety Net:
Medicare Australia website - [www.medicareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au)
Call the PBS Information Line 1800 020 613 (free call within Australia)
Email enquiries to [pbs@health.gov.au](mailto:pbs@health.gov.au)