What are the changes?
Amendments to the National Health Act 1953, as part of the same-sex law reforms, allow same-sex de facto partners and any dependent children to use the PBS Safety Net as a family.

PBS patient payments for medicines required by these families can be combined towards a joint Safety Net threshold. Once the threshold is reached, all members of a family can be included on the same Safety Net card and access Safety Net benefits.

Who is included in a family?
For the purposes of the PBS Safety Net, a family can include:
- a person, and
- a legally married or de facto partner of the same or opposite-sex, and
- children under 16 years in the care of the person or their partner
- full time students dependent on the person or their partner.

For PBS Safety Net purposes, both partners of a couple must be living together on a permanent basis (unless living apart due to illness).

How is de facto defined?
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.

The definitions for de facto partner and dependent child apply in the same way for couples in same-sex or opposite-sex relationships and families.

Do families need to register for the PBS Safety Net?
No. Families do not need to register with Medicare Australia as a PBS Safety Net family. A family can ask their pharmacist to add eligible PBS payments to the same prescription record form. Pharmacists can provide information about combining payment amounts for family PBS Safety Net totals and requirements for obtaining a PBS Safety Net card.

Can same-sex couples and families claim back PBS payments above the Safety Net threshold for medicines supplied before 1 January 2009?
No. The changes to include same-sex couples in PBS Safety Net families apply from 1 January 2009. Only PBS payments from this date onwards can be combined towards a joint Safety Net threshold for these families.

Do 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.

What if the members of a family change during the year?
Inform your pharmacist. PBS payments can be tallied towards a joint Safety Net threshold only if the person is a member of the family at the time the supply is made.

For further information on the PBS Safety Net:
Medicare Australia website – www.medicareaustralia.gov.au
Call the PBS Information Line on 1800 020 613 (free call within Australia)
Email enquiries to pbs@health.gov.au