



## The evolution of the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa (1946–2026)

### Custodians of a profession: The Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa at 80

In a rapidly changing professional landscape, where organisations often struggle to remain relevant beyond a generation, the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa (PSSA) stands out as a resilient and enduring institution. As the Society marks its 80th anniversary this year, it reflects not only longevity but also sustained leadership, adaptability, and an unwavering commitment to advancing pharmacy in the public interest.

Organised pharmacy in South Africa predates the formal establishment of the PSSA by several decades. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, pharmacists began forming provincial and regional bodies to protect professional standards, promote ethical practice, and advocate for autonomous regulation. These included the South African Pharmaceutical Association in the Eastern Cape, the Cape Pharmaceutical Society in the Western Cape, and the *Het Pharmaceutisch Genootskap van de Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek*, later known as the Transvaal Pharmaceutical Society. While geographically dispersed, these early organisations shared a common purpose: to professionalise pharmacy and safeguard its scientific and ethical foundations within a rapidly modernising society.

A decisive step towards national collaboration came in 1924 with the formation of the Associated Pharmaceutical Societies of South Africa. Among its most enduring contributions was the establishment of the *South African Pharmaceutical Journal (SAPJ)* in 1934. Conceived as a platform for professional communication, debate, and cohesion, SAPJ helped unite pharmacists across regions and practice settings, fostering a shared professional identity.

Nearly a century after its founding, the SAPJ remains one of the longest-running professional journals in South Africa and a defining pillar of the PSSA's intellectual and professional legacy. Since its first publication in 1934 under the stewardship of the PSSA, SAPJ has served as the enduring voice and intellectual heartbeat of the pharmacy profession, chronicling its scientific progress, policy debates, and evolving practice. The journal's confirmation on the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) accredited Scopus list in 2024 represents a landmark achievement in the PSSA's 80-year journey, affirming decades of scholarly leadership while projecting South African pharmacy knowledge confidently into the global academic arena.

The PSSA was formally inaugurated on 1 January 1946, incorporating eight constituent societies under a single national body. From its inception, the PSSA adopted an inclusive membership model, welcoming pharmacists across all sectors of practice. Its founding governance structure carefully balanced central coordination with branch autonomy, enabling the Society to speak with a unified national voice while remaining responsive to regional realities. This model proved instrumental in establishing the PSSA as the authoritative professional body for pharmacy in South Africa.

The PSSA's identity is powerfully expressed through its registered emblem. More than a decorative symbol, the emblem reflects the Society's values and purpose. National symbolism is interwoven with the core elements of pharmacy: learning, science, professional practice, and social responsibility, affirmed by the motto *Pro salute et bono populi: for the health and well-being of the people*. Together, these elements sum up who the PSSA is, what it stands for, and how it understands its role within South African society and the profession's future.

As pharmacy practice diversified in response to scientific advances and health system needs, the PSSA recognised the importance of structured sectoral representation. Over time, specialist groupings were established and incorporated into the Society's broader framework, including:

- The South African Chemists' and Druggists' Protection Association (1946) later renamed the South African Association of Community Pharmacists (SAACP) around 2015.
- The South African Association of Hospital and Institutional Pharmacists (SAAHIP) (1957)
- The Academy of Pharmaceutical Sciences of South Africa (APSSA) (1979)
- The South African Association of Pharmacists in Industry (SAAPI) (1995)

These developments reflected the growing complexity of pharmacy practice and ensured that diverse professional perspectives informed PSSA policy, advocacy, and strategic direction.

The PSSA has long recognised that the future of the profession depends on meaningful engagement with pharmacy students. Following the establishment of the South African Pharmacy Students' Federation (SAPSF) in 1953, the PSSA progressively

acknowledged SAPSF as the representative voice of pharmacy students. Over time, this relationship evolved into a structured partnership, with SAPSF leaders participating in PSSA platforms and national professional conversations. Many have since transitioned into leadership roles within PSSA structures, reflecting a strong intergenerational continuum.

Central to the PSSA's mission has been sustained investment in people. The establishment of the Foundation for Pharmaceutical Education (FPE) marked a significant commitment to supporting students and young professionals through bursaries and educational assistance, strengthening access to the profession and promoting equity. To date, the Fund has awarded over 1000 bursaries nationwide, with beneficiaries frequently attesting to its transformative impact on their professional journeys.

The formation of the Young Pharmacists' Group (YPG) in 2014 further reinforced this commitment. The YPG has created a dynamic platform for early-career pharmacists to engage in leadership development, professional advocacy, and innovation, and has become an important pipeline for future leaders within the Society.

Recognising the importance of institutional memory, the PSSA played a pivotal role in establishing the Pharmacy Museum in 1954, initially administered by the Southern Gauteng Branch. The Museum preserves artefacts, documents, and narratives that trace the evolution of pharmacy practice in South Africa, serving both as a historical repository and an educational resource. In 2024, much of the Museum's administration was transferred to the PSSA National Office, strengthening its national character. The Museum is now a fully-fledged Section 21 not-for-profit company, a development welcomed as a major step in safeguarding the profession's heritage for future generations.

By the late 1990s, evolving professional dynamics and tensions between regional and sectoral participation necessitated constitutional reform. Following extensive consultation, a new PSSA Constitution was adopted at a Special General Meeting on 19 November 1999. The revised Constitution formally recognised both regional and sectoral branches and restructured leadership to ensure more inclusive governance. SAPJ at the time described the new Constitution as "one for all and all for one," capturing its spirit of unity and renewal.

As pharmacy became increasingly globalised, the PSSA expanded its international engagement. The Society was among the inaugural members of the African Pharmaceutical Forum (APF) in April 2004, contributing to continental collaboration and professional solidarity. Long-standing membership in

the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) and active participation in the Commonwealth Pharmacists Association (CPA) further positioned South African pharmacy within global professional discourse. These international affiliations have not only strengthened knowledge exchange, policy alignment, and professional collaboration but have also showcased South African pharmacy on the global stage. This culminated in the CPA biannual conference in Durban in 2011, and the 82nd FIP World Congress in Cape Town in 2024, a historic first for Sub-Saharan Africa in FIP's 112-year history, highlighting the PSSA's enduring role as a leader and custodian of the profession both nationally and internationally.

As the PSSA marks 80 years of service to the profession, transformation stands as a defining thread linking its proud legacy to its future ambitions. True to its founding purpose, the PSSA continues to broaden participation, opening pathways to leadership, ownership, and opportunity across the profession. Through sustained advocacy and policy engagement, the Society has played a meaningful role in medicines policy, workforce development, and responses to major public health challenges, including HIV/AIDS and the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, it has embraced the evolving scope of pharmacy, championing roles in public health, pharmacist specialisation, digital innovation, and entrepreneurship. Guided by its 2025–2030 strategic vision and aligned with international frameworks, the Society focuses on inclusivity, innovation, and member needs, and on building stronger relationships with branches, sectors, and the public, viewing members as co-designers of the future. Central to this journey is a commitment to representation and inclusivity, ensuring that the PSSA reflects South Africa's multiracial, multicultural, and gender-diverse society, while nurturing leadership across generations. In this way, the PSSA's transformation agenda honours eight decades of stewardship while actively shaping a resilient, engaged, and impactful future for the pharmacy profession.

At 80 years, the PSSA remains the authoritative voice of pharmacy in South Africa. As the profession confronts rapid technological change, evolving scopes of practice, and the emergence of artificial intelligence, the Society's role as custodian of professional ethics, standards, and public trust is more critical than ever. Ultimately, the PSSA's greatest achievement lies not only in its structures, affiliations, or milestones, but in the generations of pharmacists, pharmacy support personnel, and students who have upheld professional excellence in the service of society. As the PSSA celebrates eight decades of service, it does so with deep respect for its past and a clear responsibility to the future.

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