

# PHARMAC

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## Pharmaceutical Management Agency

*Media release*

### **Big jump in statins use but many still not accessing – PHARMAC**

More people are getting the benefits of cholesterol-lowering statin drugs but prescribing figures could be higher yet, says PHARMAC Medical Director Dr Peter Moodie.

Figures just released in PHARMAC's 2003 Annual Review show a massive 65 percent leap in statins prescribing, with about 140,000 people now receiving the medicines.

“This is good news but we think even more people could benefit,” Dr Moodie says.

“An analysis of 2001 data showed a large degree of regional variation in the way statins were prescribed.

“The message from that analysis, which took account of population differences, is that access to these drugs varies even when the prescribing rules are consistent across the country.”

PHARMAC widened access to statins in 2002, and the effects of that decision are reflected in the 2003 figures. It's estimated that as many as 300,000 people could now be eligible for statins, so the number of people prescribed them could be higher still.

“The evidence around these medicines shows that they are effective at lowering cholesterol levels and reducing people's risk of having a heart attack or stroke, or other cardiovascular event,” Dr Moodie says.

“We're pleased that so many more people have gained access to them in 2003. Heart disease is one of the biggest killers of New Zealanders and these drugs can help reduce one of the risk factors.”

During 2003 PHARMAC ran regional pilots of a campaign, One Heart: Many Lives, to draw attention to cardiovascular disease and ways to reduce the risk. Prescribing statins for people who need them was one of the options promoted in the campaign, which is being considered for a wider roll-out.

“PHARMAC can play its role in providing access to subsidised medicines, and encourage people to use them where appropriate. However, the challenge for prescribers is to ensure people who need these drugs actually get them.”

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2/Statins release

Other major changes in pharmaceutical usage during 2003 include:

- Prescriptions for stomach ulcer drugs now exceed \$50 million
- New generation antipsychotics are now more commonly prescribed than older generation antipsychotics
- The number of women taking hormone replacement therapy has dropped 38 percent in a year
- Expenditure on long-acting beta agonist asthma inhalers increased 40 percent
- Overall, the amount of subsidised medicine prescribed for New Zealanders grew 5 percent.

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