

# **PHARMAC**

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## Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media release

### **AGREEMENT OFFERS RELIEF FOR CHILDREN WITH ARTHRITIS**

Children with arthritis will have access to a new fully-subsidised treatment from 1 February 2004.

That's when PHARMAC will begin subsidising etanercept (Enbrel), a disease-modifying agent for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis.

PHARMAC Chief Executive Wayne McNee says the drug will be targeted at a group for whom arthritis can have a significant impact on their quality of life and development during their growing years. The cost per patient will be in the region of \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year.

The number of children with arthritis who are thought to be able to access the drug is small, at only 20-30 per year, but Wayne McNee says the drug will make a big difference to them.

"This is a small group of patients who currently only face limited options for treatment," Wayne McNee says.

"Our view is that children have the most to gain from using this drug. Currently some of the subsidised treatments for arthritis are unable to be used in children, so this funding agreement increases the range of treatment options available."

Etanercept is one of the new generation arthritis drugs (known as TNF Inhibitors) that help prevent the joint inflammation that characterises arthritis. Rather than addressing the symptoms of arthritis, etanercept attacks the underlying cause of the disease.

Funding follows an agreement reached with etanercept's supplier, Wyeth.

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