

PHARMAC

Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media release

PHARMAC commits further \$39 million to NZers' health

More than 14,000 New Zealanders are set to benefit from recent decisions to invest more in medicines by Government drug-funding agency PHARMAC.

The decisions made over the last two months amount to \$39 million that will be spent on improving New Zealanders' health during the next five years. Decisions include both investing in new pharmaceuticals, and giving greater access to treatments that are already Government-subsidised.

New listings include treatments for Hepatitis C, childhood arthritis and depression. Access to the already-listed osteoporosis therapy alendronate, and a drug for preventing transplant rejection (tacrolimus) have been widened. And an innovative agreement with a pharmaceutical company means more people can now receive a cancer drug used in hospitals.

PHARMAC Chief Executive Wayne McNee says the decisions reflect PHARMAC's commitment to providing New Zealanders with greater access to new and cost-effective medicines.

“We're delighted to be able to put these decisions in place, and are confident that they will both improve people's health and, in some cases, produce downstream savings in other areas of health spending,” Wayne McNee says. “For example, treating more people with Hepatitis C can reduce the need for expensive liver transplants.”

“It's also notable that several of these decisions address areas that have been identified by the Government as health priorities, such as mental health and cancer.”

“We continue to be mindful that this is taxpayers' money that needs to be spent carefully. But we remain committed to giving New Zealanders better access to new medicines where funding allows, and making sure that money is spent on medicines that add value to current treatment options.”

The largest single investment made this year is the Hepatitis C treatment pegylated interferon, when used in combination with ribavirin. Funding all patients with chronic genotype 1 hepatitis C is estimated to cost up to \$14 million over the next five years.

“Some of these decisions give New Zealand clinicians access to medicines that are right at the cutting edge,” says PHARMAC Medical Director Dr Peter Moodie.

“For example, etanercept is one of a new class of arthritis drugs, known as TNF-alpha blockers, which attack the underlying cause of arthritis, rather than just the symptoms.

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“Pegylated interferon with ribavirin, and rituximab are new generation therapies that can prolong life, and enhance the quality of life, so providing more funding for these are important steps forward for patients.”

Wayne McNee says the budget-setting process for 2004 and beyond is now underway and PHARMAC will be seeking to have continued ability to make new investments in medicines.

Summary of investment decisions:

Medicine	Treats	Approx extra patients (over 5 years)	Additional Investment (5 years)
alendronate	Osteoporosis	3500	\$1.9 million
etanercept	Childhood arthritis	40	\$985,000
pegylated interferon/ribavirin	Hepatitis C	1250	\$14 million
rituximab	Cancer (lymphoma)	650	\$9.5 million
tacrolimus	Organ transplant	1000	\$490,000
venlafaxine	Depression	8000	\$12 million
Total		14,440	\$38,875,000

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