

PHARMAC

Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media release

Asthma patients to breathe easier

New Zealanders will have easy access to an asthma medicine from 1 November.

Government drug-funder PHARMAC has announced a decision to widen access to salmeterol (Serevent) asthma inhalers, one of the group of treatments known as long-acting beta agonists (LABAs). These are used by people whose asthma is not adequately controlled using inhaled corticosteroids, such as beclomethasone (Beclazone), budesonide (Pulmicort) or fluticasone (Flixotide) alone.

From 1 November prescribing of salmeterol will be subject to a guideline, rather than the current need for Special Authority approval. This will make it easier for people to obtain salmeterol through their GP.

PHARMAC Medical Director Dr Peter Moodie says the decision will have a significant impact on people with asthma.

“We have seen evidence that greater asthma control is achieved by combining a LABA with inhaled steroid treatment, rather than increasing doses of inhaled steroids alone,” Dr Moodie says. “This decision will mean people will be able to add a LABA (salmeterol) to their treatment at a lower inhaled steroid dose.”

“We anticipate that widening access will result in an additional 15,000 people taking LABAs over the next three years.” Currently approximately 40,000 people are using LABAs.

Dr Moodie says the type of inhaler used for salmeterol, an aerosol, is the preferred type used by many New Zealanders. Currently, most people prescribed LABAs use a dry powder device. Dr Moodie says the type of inhaler will probably mean that most new patients prescribed a LABA will choose salmeterol.

The salmeterol access widening is anticipated to result in expenditure rising by about \$8 million over the next five years.

The decision is the latest funding announcement by PHARMAC and follows decisions to widen access to the osteoporosis treatment alendronate, mycophenolate for transplants, diabetes medicine pioglitazone, and the aromatase inhibitors for breast cancer.

ENDS