

# PHARMAC

## Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media release

### **Cost less of a barrier to medicines in NZ: Report**

Cost is less likely to be a barrier to New Zealanders accessing medicines than people in comparable countries, a study by US-based health researcher the Commonwealth Fund shows.

The Commonwealth Fund's International Health Policy Survey of Sicker Adults 2005 shows that patients in Australia, Canada and the United States are more likely not to pick up a prescription because of cost than New Zealanders.

And while most New Zealanders contributed at least part of their prescription cost (co-payment), New Zealand had the lowest percentage of people among the countries surveyed of patients paying more than \$US100 per month for their prescriptions.

New Zealand's percentage of patients paying over \$US100 per month for their prescriptions was joint-lowest with the UK. Australia's rate (9%) was three-times higher, while in the United States the figure was 10 times higher (30%).

The survey, comparing New Zealand with Australia, Canada, the UK, United States and Germany, compared the experiences of patients across a range of cost and health indicators.

PHARMAC Chief Executive Wayne McNee says the Commonwealth Fund report, published on the Health Affairs website, shows that medicine cost is less of a barrier for New Zealanders than for people in the other countries surveyed.

"The survey demonstrates that while most New Zealanders contribute at least part of the cost of their medicines, people are less likely to face high prescription costs than people in countries like Australia and the United States," Wayne McNee says.

"We already know that New Zealanders are more likely to have their prescription government-subsidised than people in those countries. In New Zealand 80% of medicines sold are government-subsidised, this compares with 54% in Australia, 37% in Canada and 19% in the United States.

"This study confirms that where there are direct costs to patients, they tend to be low in New Zealand compared with other countries."

The Commonwealth Fund survey reports that 19% of New Zealand patients did not pick up a prescription because of the cost. This compared with 20% of Canadians, 22% of Australians and 40% of Americans.

Other issues canvassed in the Commonwealth Fund survey include waiting times for treatment, communication between doctors and patients and medication errors.

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