

*Media release*

## **Asthma inhaler range gets a positive shake-up**

Subsidies for asthma inhalers will get a big shake-up from 1 August.

More people will be able to have long-acting inhalers, such as Oxis and Serevent, because of relaxed prescribing rules which see Special Authorities removed.

And there will be more choice of combination inhalers, which put together an inhaled steroid and a long-acting preventer in one inhaler such as Flixotide with Serevent (Seretide) or Pulmicort with Oxis (Symbicort).

Changes include:

- access will be widened to Serevent Accuhaler, Oxis Turbuhaler and Foradil inhalers;
- the Seretide brand of combination inhaler will be subsidised; and
- there will be wider access to combination corticosteroid and LABA inhalers (Seretide, Symbicort).

PHARMAC Medical Director Dr Peter Moodie is calling the changes the most significant addition to subsidised asthma inhalers since 2001, when combination inhalers were first funded.

Combination inhalers are mainly used by people with moderate to severe asthma.

Dr Moodie says he expects more people will use long-acting preventer inhalers, or LABA inhalers, as a result of the changes.

“In addition to subsidising more combination inhalers and widening access to them, we will continue subsidising the individual long-acting inhalers such as Oxis and Serevent,” Dr Moodie says. “It is important that these continue to be available because doctors will still want to ensure their patients get the correct dose.”

At present about 42,000 New Zealanders use LABAs. Of these, about 16,000 use combination inhalers. Dr Moodie says PHARMAC anticipates that a number of those using long-acting preventers are likely to change to combination inhalers once the access changes occur.

“Overall these are exciting changes for doctors and people with asthma,” he says. “We have lowered the barriers to accessing long-acting inhalers (a Special Authority is no longer required), and people will now have a choice of combination inhalers.”

Dr Moodie predicts patients will take advantage of the newly-subsidised combination aerosol inhaler, Seretide. PHARMAC has also agreed to subsidise an aerosol-type Symbicort inhaler (Symbicort Rapihaler), should this be approved for use in New Zealand by Medsafe.

“New Zealanders seem to prefer aerosol inhalers over dry-powder devices; we are catering to this demand through subsidising Seretide,” Dr Moodie says. “This is the first time we have been able to subsidise both aerosol and dry powder combination inhalers, and a further significant step forward for asthma treatment.”

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For more information contact Simon England on 021 863 342.