

# PHARMAC

Pharmaceutical Management Agency

Media release

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## **PHARMAC decision helps respiratory patients breathe easier**

PHARMAC is investing almost \$10 million over the next five years to make a drug for chronic respiratory disease available to more New Zealanders.

Deputy Medical Director Dr Dilky Rasiah says from July 1 more people with diseases such as chronic bronchitis and emphysema will have access to the drug tiotropium (Spiriva).

Tiotropium can currently be prescribed to people with severe Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) under Special Authority. From July 1 the Special Authority will be changed to enable doctors to also prescribe the drug for patients with moderate COPD.

Dr Rasiah says widening access to this drug could lead to the number of people taking it doubling, from 5,000 currently to an estimated 10,000 patients in five years.

“Another flow-on effect of widening access is the likelihood of fewer people with chronic respiratory disease needing to be treated in hospital,” says Dr Rasiah.

“Some people with moderate forms of this disease are still requiring treatment in hospital, especially in the winter months when cold weather or other factors can severely exacerbate their illness. More people using tiotropium may result in fewer of these cases.”

Dr Rasiah says extending treatment options for respiratory illness is a priority under the New Zealand Health Strategy, and this funding decision by PHARMAC follows investments in other new drugs for chronic respiratory disease and asthma. Recent decisions have included widening access to the long-acting beta agonist medicines (such as Oxis and Serevent), and providing access to a wider range of combination inhalers (Symbicort, Seretide).

“While there are several treatments currently available for moderate chronic respiratory disease, the decision to widen access to tiotropium will give doctors another option.

“With winter now upon us, we know that this is a decision both doctors and their patients will welcome,” she says.

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