

Optimal Use of Medicines



Making the best use of medicines

The debate about access to medicines is often focused around new medicines. But getting the best out of what's already in the medicines "toolbox" is just as important.

The optimal use of medicines – ensuring medicines aren't overused, underused or misused – is an important way to improve people's health using medicines that are already available.

PHARMAC works on the 'optimal use of medicines' to ensure medicines reach the people they are intended for, and are used well.

Why do we promote the responsible use of medicines?

Promoting the responsible use of medicines (otherwise known as 'optimal use') is one of PHARMAC's statutory functions.

Optimal use initiatives help make the best use of the pharmaceutical budget by:

- encouraging appropriate medicines provision and use
- promoting greater use where appropriate
- reducing use where appropriate
- avoiding inefficiency
- reducing disparity
- allowing other medicines to be subsidised with the money saved from avoiding wastage.

How do we promote the optimal use of medicines?

We work closely with District Health Boards in this area and have a joint working group. We also work closely with health professionals and other organisations. Our work includes:

- Promoting best practice prescribing – some of which we contract out to bpacnz. bpacnz is an independent organisation that promotes healthcare interventions which meet patient needs and are evidence based, cost effective and suitable for use in New Zealand. Its partners are ProCare Health, South Link Health, the Independent Practitioner Association Council (IPAC) and the University of Otago.
- providing information to support new medicine subsidies and/or brand changes.
- running information campaigns, both to promote reduced use of medicines (such as the Wise Use of Antibiotics campaign) or increased appropriate use (such as the One Heart Many Lives campaign).

Our analysis of medicines use in New Zealand shows that prescribing rates for medicines are not consistent across the country. This gives rise to inequalities in access to medicines. This variation is part of what drives our Māori Responsiveness Strategy, which aims to ensure equitable access to medicines for Māori. We have a dedicated team – Te Whaioranga – to ensure the objectives of the Māori Responsiveness Strategy are met. A specific campaign, He Rongoa Pai, He Oranga Whanau, has been developed to help improve use of medicines by Māori.

Campaign information

WISE USE OF ANTIBIOTICS

Co-ordinated and funded by PHARMAC since 1999, Wise Use of Antibiotics has raised awareness that antibiotics are not effective as a treatment for winter colds and flu. Research shows that awareness of the correct role of antibiotics in treating colds and flu has increased since the campaign began, and expectations of receiving an antibiotic for a cold have fallen.



One Heart Many Lives

Initially trialled in 2003, this social marketing campaign promotes awareness of cardiovascular disease. Particularly aimed at Māori and Pacific men aged 35 and over, who have a higher risk of suffering heart disease than other New Zealanders. The campaign has increased awareness about heart disease and how to manage risk factors by eating better, stopping smoking, and becoming more physically active. We've also seen an increase in use of the SPARC Green Prescriptions programme, and greater than average increase in prescriptions for cholesterol-lowering medication.



Asthma management

We work with the Asthma and Respiratory Foundation to encourage the optimal use of asthma medicines. Campaigns have been run to improve adult asthma management, largely focussed on the appropriate use of inhaled corticosteroids, the most common asthma preventer medicine. We support continuing education programmes for pharmacists to teach the correct techniques for asthma inhaler usage. We have also worked with asthma educators and the Māori Asthma Society, Tu Kotahi, to develop and publish a flip chart and a support kit for asthma educators.

More recently, we've been working with the Asthma and Respiratory Foundation to develop a programme aimed at managing asthma in children.



Gut Reaction

The Gut Reaction campaign has been developed to provide patients and health professionals about medicines management for dyspepsia (heartburn, indigestion and other gastro-intestinal problems). While proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) can be useful for some patients, there are several alternative choices which can be made. Gut Reaction seeks to raise awareness of current prescribing behaviour with doctors and pharmacists by providing training in various forms, updates and toolkits for dyspepsia medicines management.



PHARMAC is the Government agency that decides, on behalf of District Health Boards (DHBs), which medicines get subsidised so that they are more affordable for New Zealanders and available nationally. The subsidies PHARMAC sets are funded from a fixed budget that is part of DHB funding. PHARMAC also promotes the optimal use of medicines, carries out some procurement for DHBs, and manages special access programmes for some medicines.

Information Sheets on various PHARMAC topics are available from our website: www.pharmac.govt.nz/patients/infosheets

If you have specific areas of interest (such as consultations, committees or vacancies), visit our website and subscribe to news feeds in the area(s) of interest to you: <http://pharmac.govt.nz/feeds>

Contacting Us

Call us on 0800 66 00 50 (between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday), or on 04 460 4990 (between 8am and 5.30pm, Monday to Friday).

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Email us at enquiries@pharmac.govt.nz – we respond to all emails