

Minutes of the Consumer and Patient Working Group Meeting Thursday 26 February 2026

The meeting was held online from 2pm to 4pm.

Present:

Malcolm Mulholland (Chair)
Rachel Smalley (Deputy Chair)
Libby Burgess
Tim Edmonds
Chris Higgins
Francesca Holloway
Trent Lash
Gerard Rushton
Deon York
Tracy Tierney

Reset programme team:

Jannel Fisher (Reset Programme Manager), Sam McCarthy (Reset Programme Project Manager), Becky Littlewood (Reset Programme Coordinator) Ross Henderson (Reset Programme Engagement Lead), Danielle Campbell (Reset Project Manager).

Pharmac staff attendees:

Augusta Connor (Senior Health Economist), Caro De Luca (Manager Expert Advisory), Claire Pouwels (Manager, Pharmaceutical Funding).

Apologies:

1. Karakia and welcome

2. Minutes of previous meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting minutes were approved.

- Moved by: Libby
- Seconded by: Deon

3. Action items

Action items were noted.

4. Interest register

No new declarations or changes were made.

5. Application backlog pilot

Pharmac provided an update on work to reduce the backlog of historic applications, noting that the overall backlog is decreasing.

As part of this work, a small pilot project is being tested to explore whether the assessment process for lower-cost, lower-risk applications can be streamlined. This pilot is one of several initiatives being considered to help the timeliness of application assessments.

Feedback provided by members ahead of the meeting, and the senior health economist responded to questions from the group. This included discussion about making decisions with less information while still ensuring robustness.

Some members raised concerns about unintended consequences of the pilot, such as the risk that more lower-cost applications could be progressed more quickly than complex or higher-cost applications. These concerns were acknowledged and will be considered as part of evaluating the pilot's feasibility.

Members also suggested introducing a pre-application step, where early discussions with medicine suppliers could help triage applications and support more efficient processing.

Agreed action:

- *Members will be updated at a future meeting on the results of the small pilot project and next steps.*

6. Inactive applications

Pharmac presented an overview of how inactive applications are currently defined and managed. Members were asked for advice on how best to manage inactive applications when no new information has been provided or when no supplier is available. Pharmac noted that applications recommended for decline can be reopened if new information becomes available.

The group discussed how Pharmac monitors the number and composition of inactive applications. Members sought clarification on how real-world evidence is considered. Some members encouraged the use of international best practice to help manage applications. Some members also identified opportunities for consumer and advocacy groups to help progress inactive applications.

Members expressed interest in greater transparency around decisions to decline inactive applications, including clear communication of the reasons for decline and guidance on what would be required for an application to be reopened. They noted that this would be particularly valuable for consumers.

7. General business

Malcolm and Rachel presented to the Pharmac Board regarding the importance of operational budget and strong consumer voices to support future improvement work and maintain current momentum.

Agreed action:

- *Working group agenda has been adjusted for members to discuss consumer input mechanisms ahead of the Pharmac Board meeting in March.*

Close of meeting at 3.50pm.

Next meeting is on Thursday 12 March 2.00pm – 4.00pm to discuss consumer advice framework and consultation process.