



MEDIA RELEASE

Funding to save Australian cancer patients up to \$150,000

28 Nov 2019

From next week, Australians living with non-small cell lung cancer and early stage acute lymphoblastic leukaemia will be able to access better treatment, thanks to two significant amendments to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

From December 1, more than 2,200 patients with metastatic non-small cell lung cancer will be able to access Keytruda® (pembrolizumab) as a first line treatment in combination with chemotherapy, saving patients up to \$120,000 for each course of treatment.

Keytruda® belongs to a new class of immunotherapy medicines that supercharges the body's own immune system to detect and fight cancer cells.

Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, said the expanded listings would provide numerous benefits for patients, including a potential quicker route to cure and recovery.

"Most patients will not have to fail chemotherapy before gaining access to this game changing treatment," Minister Hunt said.

"Patients may have otherwise paid up to \$120,000 a year depending on their specific cancer subtype.

"As a result of this listing, Australians with lung cancer will have the broadest access to Keytruda in the world."

In addition, the existing PBS listing of leukaemia medicine Blincyto® (blinatumomab) will be expanded on December 1, saving patients up to \$150,000 per course of treatment.

Blincyto® will now be available for the treatment of patients in the early stage of acute lymphoblastic leukaemia, but have minimal residual disease (MRD). A patient has MRD if they respond well to initial chemotherapy but a small number of cancer cells can still be detected.

Each of these listings has been recommended by the independent Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee.

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Hon **Barnaby Joyce** MP

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR NEW ENGLAND

Member for New England, Barnaby Joyce, welcomed the new PBS subsidies.

“These are important PBS listings given that lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths in our country and up to 450 Australians are diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia each year, of which about half are children,” Mr Joyce said.

“These announcements will give Australians suffering from lung cancer and this rare form of leukaemia, real hope they can recover and return to living a healthy life.”

Since 2013, the Australian Government has approved more than 2,200 new or amended listings on the PBS. This represents an average of around 30 new or amended PBS listings per month – or one each day – at an overall investment by the Government of \$10.7 billion since 2013.

(ENDS)

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