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Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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Government Boosts Chronic Illness Prescriptions

From today, more medicines for chronic illnesses will be subsidised by the Australian Government through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) for up to 12 months.

Medicines that are now available under this arrangement include various cholesterol lowering medicines and pancreatic enzyme treatments, and carmellose sodium with glycerin (Optive®) eye drops.

The availability of some medicines through the PBS for up to 12 months was announced in the 2008-09 federal Budget. Today's listings complement others that were listed on 1 November 2008.

Carmellose sodium with glycerin has not been available through the PBS previously. These eye drops will be of extra convenience to patients, as this medicine has a shelf life of six months after opening, whereas other lubricant eye drops have a 28-day expiry, once opened.

Other changes to the medicines subsidised by the PBS from today will benefit people with cerebral palsy, hepatitis B and C, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and osteoporosis.

Patients with cerebral palsy will benefit from extensions to the listings of botulinum toxin type A purified neurotoxin complex (Botox®) and clostridium botulinum type A toxin hemagglutinin complex (Dysport®), and patients eligible for these subsidised medicines include adult patients who have previously responded to treatment as children.

These medicines improve the gait and reduce the risk of permanent muscle contraction in the affected limbs of patients with cerebral palsy. The extensions of these listings are estimated to benefit around 65 adult patients who may require treatment in any one year, and will cost the Government \$81,023 per year.

Cerebral palsy is a neurological disorder that affects the body's movement and muscle coordination. In Australia, it is estimated that a person with cerebral palsy is born every 18 hours.

Patients with chronic hepatitis B, who have not previously been treated with PBS-subsidised therapy, will now have access to telbivudine (Sebivo®) 600mg tablets. This extended listing will cost the Government about \$5.6 million over five years and will treat about 1,500 patients by its fifth year of listing.

New listings of ribavirin and peginterferon alfa-2b (Pegatron®) have been added to the PBS for the treatment of patients who have chronic hepatitis C, following treatment with other PBS-listed medicines. The additional cost to the PBS is estimated to be \$30.6 million over the next four years.

The listing for docetaxel injections (Taxotere®) has been extended to include the treatment of oral, larynx, oropharynx and hypopharynx cancers, in conjunction with surgery and radiotherapy. This extended listing will cost the Government about \$18 million over five years and benefit about 500 patients by its fifth year.

Children with ADHD who are older and have a higher bodyweight will benefit from the additional dosages of 80mg and 100mg atomoxetine hydrochloride (Strattera®) capsules subsidised through the PBS.

Patients with ADHD generally have difficulty paying attention to instructions, finishing tasks, relating to others and staying settled. The additional dosages of atomoxetine hydrochloride will be cost-neutral to the PBS, as they will treat existing patients.

Zoledronic acid (Aclasta®) has been added to the PBS for the treatment of osteoporosis in patients with a hip fracture due to minimal trauma, and in post menopausal women with other minimal trauma fractures.

Osteoporosis results from the deterioration of bone density, leading to an increased risk of fracture. About one in two women and one in three men over the age of 60 in Australia have a fracture due to osteoporosis.

Information about medicines subsidised by the Government through the PBS is available at www.pbs.gov.au

For all media inquiries, please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220.