



Media Release

10 July 2024

Relief as new bowel cancer drugs announced

Years of advocacy from Bowel Cancer New Zealand (NZ) and other groups calling for new bowel cancer drugs has led to a funding announcement from Pharmac for two new medicines, cetuximab (Erbix) and pembrolizumab (Keytruda).

Rebekah Heal, general manager of Bowel Cancer NZ says, "This is fantastic news and acknowledgement of all the hard mahi by our bowel cancer community. We celebrate this milestone while also acknowledging all those who bravely fought alongside us and aren't here today."

After pressure from patients and advocacy groups, the government delivered on the promised funding boost for Pharmac, with an extra \$604 million guaranteed over the next four years towards 54 new drugs.

"There's no doubt it's a relief to see these drugs announced as they will be the first bowel cancer medicines funded in over 20 years. This will help relieve some of the enormous financial burden so many bowel cancer patients are shouldering. It's also evident just how underfunded Pharmac has been until now," says Heal.

Keytruda will be available from October 1st as a funded treatment option for Lynch Syndrome bowel cancer patients. A date has yet to be set for cetuximab, although it was listed as one of the drugs to be funded in the next year.

While cetuximab will be funded, this does not currently include bowel cancers with the BRAF mutation. Bowel Cancer NZ wants to see funding extended and expedited for patients with this mutation, like Blair Vining, who passed away in 2019.

Cancer advocate Melissa Vining says, "For many patients like Blair with a BRAF mutation, this is heartbreaking news. Facing an aggressive form of cancer with no publicly funded drugs available

leaves you with several choices: leave NZ to obtain treatment in Australia, fundraise for the treatment, sell your home if you have one or wait to die knowing that if you lived in a comparable country like Australia, your treatment would be funded. This takes an incredible toll on many New Zealanders who simply deserve a fair chance at treatment.”

This progress in funding bowel cancer drugs is encouraging, but there's still more to be done. Bowel Cancer NZ continues to advocate for bevacizumab (Avastin), which has been on the Medicine Waiting List since 2010.

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Bowel cancer symptoms include:

- Bleeding from the bottom or seeing blood in the toilet after a bowel motion
- Change of bowel motions over several weeks without returning to normal
- Persistent or periodic severe pain in the abdomen
- A lump or mass in the abdomen
- Tiredness and loss of weight for no particular reason
- Anaemia.

More information on bowel cancer and Bowel Cancer New Zealand can be found at <http://www.bowelcancernz.org.nz>

For further information:

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About Bowel Cancer New Zealand

- Bowel Cancer New Zealand is a patient-focused charity organisation.
- The registered charity was founded in 2010 by a group of people affected by bowel cancer, committed to improving bowel cancer awareness and outcomes for people with the disease.
- Bowel Cancer New Zealand aims to provide clear and up-to-date information about the disease, symptoms, what to do if diagnosed and supports patients and whānau affected by bowel cancer.
- Bowel Cancer New Zealand aims to prevent lives from being lost to this disease and promote the national screening program rollout in New Zealand.