



Media Release

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Significant drug funding milestone for cancer patients

Today marks a significant milestone with the funding of cetuximab (branded as Erbitux) for advanced bowel cancer patients with left-sided, RAS wild-type and BRAF wild-type, metastatic colorectal cancer (mCRC).

This development comes after tireless campaigning by Bowel Cancer NZ and patient advocates who had to set up Givealittle pages to finance this life-extending drug in the absence of government funding. Many patients courageously fought for its accessibility, even knowing that it may be too late for them.

The Chief Executive of Bowel Cancer NZ, Peter Huskinson, says, "Today's announcement is a testament to the unwavering strength and determination of our bowel cancer community. Patients and their families have shown incredible resilience, advocating for a treatment they believe can change lives. We honour the memory of those who fought bravely and have since lost their lives, and we remain committed to ensuring that bowel cancer patients' voices are heard."

Pharmac anticipates that about 380 patients will benefit from cetuximab in the first year of funding. This includes 140 people who have not received any prior treatments for metastatic disease and 240 individuals who have received one or more previous treatments. In addition, they understand that around 60 people privately funding cetuximab could move into the publicly funded setting.

Huskinson says, "The funding of this new bowel cancer medicine is a vital step forward, but the journey is far from over. There remain patients with other forms of advanced disease who are not yet getting treatments that PHARMAC has long since assessed as cost-effective. Therefore, Bowel Cancer NZ continues to call for cetuximab to be extended for BRAF-mutated metastatic colorectal cancer in combination with encorafenib and for bevacizumab (Avastin) to be funded, which has been on the Medicine Waiting List for fourteen years.

"All around the world, patients, doctors, funding agencies, governments and pharmaceutical suppliers are doing better at reducing the delay in the availability of effective medicines through prompt assessment, responsible pricing, and timely appropriation of public funds. Lives depend on it. We want what all Kiwis want for our loved ones - not to miss the chance for the best survival outcomes and additional months and years of life. We urge the government and the health sector to work to make this the start of a new era rather than a one-off belated catch-up.

“In the meantime, we encourage all those affected by bowel cancer to seek support and to stay informed about new treatment options. Together, we can continue to push for advancements that save lives and improve the well-being of our community,” says Huskinson.

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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.