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PHARMAC
Te Pātaka Whaioranga
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Submission on Possible brand changes through the annual tender

Tēnā koutou

Age Concern New Zealand He Manaakitanga Kaumātua Aotearoa welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on *Possible brand changes through the annual tender.*,

Our feedback is specifically from the perspective of our mahi with older New Zealanders. Our expertise is not about the medications themselves but how to effectively engage with older New Zealanders and things to consider if changes are implemented.

PHARMAC's proposal is of interest to us as older adults are likely to have one or more health conditions that require them to take regular medications. Health conditions impacting older adults can include high blood pressure, arthritis, diabetes, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, cognitive impairments, kidney and liver disease and cancer.

The Healthify He Puna Waiora website states that "most New Zealanders aged 70 and above are prescribed four or more medicines and a small number take as many as 20 different medicines.¹ This means the older population will be impacted by proposed changes.

Who we are

Age Concern is a trusted charity working in local communities throughout Aotearoa to support older people, their friends and whānau. Our values – Dignity, Wellbeing, Equity, and Respect for older people are our guiding lights and underpin everything we do. We aim to ensure older New Zealanders get the best advice and support no matter where they live in Aotearoa.

With a network of 28 local Age Concerns operating in 38 locations, and a national office based in Wellington, we are the place to go for services and information about issues for older New Zealanders.

¹ <https://healthify.nz/medicines-a-z/m/medicines-a-guide-for-older-adults>

We are proud of our heritage in standing up for the rights of older New Zealanders for more than 75 years. As an organisation, our focus is contributing to the overall health and wellbeing of older New Zealanders. We work to prevent the abuse and neglect of older adults; improve their health and wellbeing; reduce loneliness and social isolation; and provide advocacy for older people's rights.

Our feedback

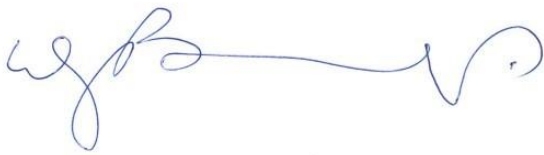
1. Communication about any brand changes needs to be early and often using plain language explanations and instructions that are easy to understand. Changes to a brand of medication can cause anxiety so the rationale for the change and any information provided to users' needs to be clear and easy to understand.
2. Communication channels will need to include paper-based materials and face-to-face advice from a health professional given not all older adults or people with disabilities have access to online information.
3. Information must be provided in accessible formats and in multiple languages so that older people with disabilities and from different ethnic groups can access the correct information.
4. Ensure that older people living rurally or in isolated areas are not disadvantaged in terms of communication about any changed brands.
5. Identify and maximise the role GPs, pharmacists and other health professionals can play supporting older people with any changes to their medication. Support from a trusted health professional will be crucial to any changes going smoothly.
6. Ensure older people are advised about what to do and who to contact if they experience any adverse reactions to a new brand of medication.
7. Ensure that older people and those with disabilities will be able to open the bottles or blister packs of any changed medications. Some long-term conditions such as arthritis impact on older people's dexterity which can be a barrier to people taking their medication.

In addition to the feedback above we recommend the removal of any barriers for older New Zealanders who need to access blister packs for their medications, including service fees.

Closing comment

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our submission on *Possible brand changes through the annual tender*. We appreciate PHARMAC reaching out to us and seeking our input and we look forward to hearing the outcome of your consultation process.

Ngā mihi



Karen Billings-Jensen
Chief Executive
Age Concern New Zealand