

Media Release
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Drug access recommendations a step in the right direction but more needs to be done, says Cancer Council

Cancer Council has welcomed the Australian Government's response to a review of medicines and medical devices but says more needs to be done to address inequities in access to potentially life-saving cancer drugs.

Cancer Council Australia CEO, Professor Sanchia Aranda, said the recommendations were "an important step in the right direction".

"In general, the recommendations supported by Government, such as accepting assessments from comparable overseas regulators, should speed up the process of subsidising vital medicines in Australia," Professor Aranda said.

"Separate recommendations to expedite approvals in certain circumstances, and to apply new, transparent criteria for accelerated assessment of promising new drugs, should also benefit cancer patients who are currently disadvantaged by the system.

"At a broad level, the reforms have significant potential. We will need to look at the detail more closely to get a better sense of how they will address current inequities. The Government should nonetheless be commended for its response."

Professor Aranda said patients most adversely affected by current inequities included those whose cancer types did not provide a large enough incentive to attract major investment from pharmaceutical companies. The high costs to government of subsidising patent-protected medicines was a further complication.

"I have no doubt that the government wants to improve access to medicines for those who could gain a significant benefit in extending and some cases saving their lives," Professor Aranda said. "The reality is that these are complex policy matters made more complex by the costs to the taxpayer.

"Governments everywhere will need to look at this issue more broadly, as our cancer burden increases and other healthcare costs grow as well.

"Only this week the Government's new *Australia's Health* report showed that cancer was now our leading cause of death. More and more people, in Australia and overseas, will be desperately seeking access to medicines that might extend or save their lives.

"By supporting new flexibilities in drug assessments, the Government is taking an important step in the right direction. There is a moral obligation for the pharmaceutical sector to do more to provide compassionate access for people who fall through the cracks in a complex system."

Professor Aranda said that Australia's Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme had served the nation well and that the Government review of medicines was intended to refine a generally effective system.

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