

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **New HIV treatments welcome**

The listing of two new HIV treatment options on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) is good news for people living with HIV, the National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS (NAPWA) has said. The organisation also called on the federal government to expedite the listing of an urgently needed treatment for HIV-associated lipoatrophy.

“Today is World AIDS Day and from today, people living with HIV will have expanded treatment options, thanks to the decision to list raltegravir on the PBS,” said NAPWA treatments spokesperson Bill Whittaker. “Raltegravir is the first drug in the integrase inhibitor class to gain PBS listing, so today is an important milestone in the history of HIV treatment in this country.”

Also known by the brand name Isentress®, raltegravir is used in combination with other anti-HIV drugs to inhibit HIV replication. While there is no cure for HIV infection, anti-HIV drugs are now capable of preventing disease progression for very long periods.

“Unfortunately, not all drugs work for all people, and the development of resistance to available treatments means that most people will need to change treatments from time to time. That’s why it’s important that we continue to make new drugs available for HIV,” he said.

Also newly listed on the PBS from today is a new paediatric formulation of the protease inhibitor lopinavir/ritonavir (Kaletra®). “This is great news for children living with HIV, for whom treatment options are too limited. While there are only a small number of HIV-positive children in Australia, we need to ensure that treatments are made available for these most vulnerable boys and girls,” he said.

The organisation also called on the federal government to provide PBS listing for Sculptra™, a treatment for HIV-associated lipoatrophy. “Unfortunately for many people living with HIV, dealing with the toxic long-term side effects of HIV treatments remains a major challenge,” Whittaker said. “One of the biggest challenges is the physical disfigurement of facial lipoatrophy – the loss of fatty tissue from the face resulting in the gaunt, hollow-cheeked look that is too often a signature of long-term HIV treatment.”

“People with facial lipoatrophy have reduced quality of life because their appearance is a reminder to them and a signal to others that they are living with HIV,” he said.

“But there is hope: an injectable treatment called poly-L-lactic acid has been successfully used for some years to reverse this condition and restore self-esteem and quality of life. Unfortunately, the cost of treatment is too high for most people; that’s why NAPWA strongly supports the application for PBS listing of Sculptra, and today we call on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee to make this desperately needed treatment available without delay.

“World AIDS Day is a day for remembering the friends and family we have lost to HIV, and for reminding ourselves of the need for continued effort to end the AIDS epidemic,” Whittaker said. “The listing of these new drugs on the PBS provides a reminder of how far we have come in the field of HIV treatment, yet we shouldn’t lose sight of how much remains to be done.”

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