

17 December 2020

PHARMAC

By email: mstacordinator@pharmac.govt.nz

Proposal for funded multiple sclerosis treatments

Dear Sir / Madam

The New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) wishes to provide feedback on the above consultation. We note that PHARMAC is proposing some changes to the way that multiple sclerosis treatments are funded, as well as widening access to the funded treatments, from 1 March 2021. We understand that the proposed changes entail the following:

- applications to the Multiple Sclerosis Treatment Assessment Committee (MSTAC) would no longer be required and funded multiple sclerosis treatments would be accessed by a standard Special Authority application in the same way as many other funded medicines.
- access to funded multiple sclerosis treatments would be widened for people with an Expanded Disability Status Scale (EDSS) score of 0 to 6.0 (inclusive) meaning treatment would continue to be funded for patients while their EDSS is 6.0 or below.

The NZMA is strongly supportive of the above proposed changes. The proposed transition to standard Special Authority would allow funded access to these treatments to be managed in a more streamlined way. The widening of access would also mean that most patients could stay on funded treatment for longer. We note that the proposals are in line with recommendations from PHARMAC's clinical advisors.

However, we share concerns that have been expressed by Multiple Sclerosis New Zealand that patients will continue to be denied or delayed in starting these treatments until they have a second multiple sclerosis episode. We ask PHARMAC to consider adopting the internationally-accepted 2017 revision to the McDonald Criteria¹ which many other countries follow, allowing a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis based on clinical factors.

Yours sincerely



Dr Kate Baddock
NZMA Chair

¹ Thompson AJ, et al. Diagnosis of multiple sclerosis: 2017 revisions of the McDonald criteria. *Lancet Neurol.* 2018 Feb;17(2):162-173.