

Access To Medicines Coalition (ATM)

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Medicine funding system should be overhauled

The Access To Medicines (ATM) Coalition is calling on the Ministry of Health to completely overhaul the way medicines are funded in New Zealand, including stripping PHARMAC of some of its roles.

The call comes as part of ATM's submission to the Ministry of Health on a draft National Medicines Strategy, unveiled by Associate Health Minister Peter Dunne in December last year.

ATM spokesman John Forman says a complete overhaul is necessary because fine tuning to the current system will only result in continued failure to ensure access to medicines for all people who need them.

"It is inappropriate, for example, for PHARMAC to be in charge of assessing both whether a medicine is clinically effective and cost effective. A separate body should be set up for assessing the clinical effectiveness of medicines - as exists in Australia - as PHARMAC's primary focus is on cost at the expense of patient need."

In its submission to the Ministry, ATM is also questioning PHARMAC's input into setting its own budgets.

"Budgetary constraints are often used as an excuse by PHARMAC for not funding needed medicines, yet PHARMAC themselves are involved in setting these budgets," says John Forman. "Patients are being told the cupboard is bare when PHARMAC consistently reports coming in under budget year after year. The system has to change."

ATM believes that PHARMAC's dual role is causing decisions on clinical effectiveness to be confused with a product's affordability.

“It may be more appropriate for DHBs to take responsibility for jointly making decisions on clinical effectiveness and appropriate guidelines for using new medicines,” says John Forman. “Separating decisions on clinical effectiveness and affordability will create more transparent decision making about the adequacy of the total budget, and generate greater confidence in the health sector.”

ATM combines the voices of 26 non-government organisations advocating for increased access to medicines in New Zealand. Members of the coalition are all disease-specific groups that provide support, information/education, health promotion or clinical services to their constituent groups.

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For a copy of ATM’s detailed submission:

<http://www.nzordgroups.org.nz/cms/imagelibrary/100402.pdf>

ATM website: <http://www.atmcoalition.org.nz/>