

Access To Medicines Coalition (ATM)

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PHARMAC's commitment to consultation questioned

The Access To Medicines Coalition is questioning PHARMAC's role in the public consultation over medicines strategy for New Zealand, following statements made this morning which suggested they have no intention of changing their current policies.

ATM says PHARMAC's consultation document undermines the credibility of a draft National Medicines Strategy unveiled by the Government last week by concluding that there are no persuasive arguments for treating the funding of high-cost medicines differently to other medicines.

"It's crucial to understand that high-cost medicines are often life-saving, whereas lower cost medicines more often focus on improving quality of life," says ATM spokesman John Forman. "If we were to use PHARMAC's method for prioritising surgical procedures, we'd be saying that heart transplants are less important than having an ingrowing toenail removed."

The Government's draft National Medicines Strategy suggested improved access to medicines, a principles-based decision framework and introducing equity as a key factor in decision making, but left PHARMAC to its own devices in conducting a separate review of high-cost therapies.

"We expressed concern last week that it was not good news to have PHARMAC leading a separate discussion on high cost therapies, and now questions are being raised by PHARMAC which seem to put the future of the National Medicines Strategy in doubt," says John Forman.

PHARMAC is asking whether it is "appropriate" to fund high cost medicines for "a few people" at the expense of lower cost medicines that benefit a larger number of people.

“That is not always the correct question - healthcare is not a business,” says John Forman. “The focus should be on creating a system that provides greater access to medicines for everybody, not on robbing Peter to pay Paul. PHARMAC has clearly been unable to get past its narrow focus on cost utility, at the expense of a strategy to meet patient needs.”

ATM is concerned that if PHARMAC’s approach prevails, the hopes of fairer access to medicines for thousands of New Zealanders will be dashed. “For PHARMAC to publicly consult on a matter that they’ve said at the outset is already decided is a waste of time,” Forman concludes.

ATM combines the voices of 25 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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