

May 11, 2021

UPDATE: THE GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA AND BC PHARMACARE ANNOUNCE BIOSIMILARS PROGRAM EXPANSION

Background

The PharmaCare Biosimilars Initiative was launched in 2019 to expand health care services in B.C. by switching patients from biologic (originator) drugs to biosimilar versions shown to be as safe and effective.

Since its launch, the Initiative has successfully switched many PharmaCare patients to an approved biosimilar drug. Health Canada supports switching from an originator to a biosimilar, finding no meaningful differences between the two. Biosimilar drugs are approved for use by Health Canada and are as safe and effective. Switching to biosimilars, which are less costly than originators, means that B.C. can spend money in other areas of our health care system. For example, PharmaCare will be able to cover more drug options.

Important Timelines

Each switch period is six months. Employees taking one of the originator drugs covered by PharmaCare should speak to their prescriber before the switch period ends. The prescriber can write a new prescription, for the biosimilar, and coverage will continue until the drug's renewal date. After the switch period ends, PharmaCare only covers the biosimilar version(s).

For any questions, visit <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/pharmacare-for-bc-residents/what-we-cover/drug-coverage/biosimilars-initiative-patients/biosimilars-faq-patients>

Current Biosimilar Switch:

On April 7, 2021 to October 6, 2021 patients on the biologic drug **Humira** will be transitioned over a six-month period to one of five adalimumab biosimilars. Coverage for the etanercept biosimilars Brenzys and Erelzi will also be expanded allowing new and existing plaque psoriasis patients currently being treated with Enbrel to transition over the same six-month period.

Humira, and its biosimilars **Amgevita, Hadlima, Hulio, Hyrimoz and Idacio**, are used to treat: rheumatoid arthritis, polyarticular juvenile idiopathic arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, hidradenitis suppurativa, moderate to severe plaque psoriasis, and psoriatic arthritis.

Patient Information Sheet https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/health-drug-coverage/pharmacare/patient_information_sheet_-_adalimumab.pdf

Pacific Blue Cross

Pacific Blue Cross will follow BC PharmaCare in no longer covering this originator biologic medication and recommending a safe and effective biosimilar option instead. This means that any employee currently prescribed **Humira** will need to be transitioned to one of the noted biosimilar **Amgevita, Hadlima, Hulio, Hyrimoz and Idacio** by their physician to maintain BC PharmaCare and ongoing Pacific Blue Cross coverage. The PBC team will start to send notices to all impacted employees this week.

Information to Review:

- "Biosimilars are highly similar versions of their biologic drugs, meaning they are just as safe and effective, but are a fraction of the cost," said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health.

- “As thousands more patients transition to the next biosimilar (adalimumab), B.C. will save over \$100 million over three years. This is in addition to savings from earlier phases of the program that are being reinvested in our health-care system. These savings have allowed us to expand coverage of treatments and add more drugs to our formulary to offer more affordable medications for British Columbians.”
- Bioengineered drugs, known as biologics, are collectively the single biggest expense for public drug plans, and their costs continue to climb. For example, from Dec. 1, 2019, to Nov. 30, 2020, PharmaCare spent almost \$94 million to provide Humira coverage. The biosimilars are at least 40% less expensive.
- Biosimilars cost anywhere from 15% to 50% less than biologics. Canada has an approximately 8% use rate, compared to other nations that have upwards of a 50% to 95% use rate.
- Health Canada confirms that patients and health-care providers can be confident that biosimilars are as effective and safe as their biologic reference drug. Other federal organizations also support the use of biosimilars.
- Coverage decisions are informed by evidence from international jurisdictions that have more than 10 years’ experience with these innovative drugs.
- After the initial biosimilars program announcement in May 2019, over 90% of PharmaCare patients are on biosimilar drugs for infliximab, etanercept and insulin glargine.
- Exceptions may be granted for patients whose physicians determine they are medically unable to transition to a biosimilar. Exceptional coverage requests are reviewed by PharmaCare’s Special Authority branch on a case-by-case basis in consultation with physician-led advisory committees, as needed.

Learn More About the Biosimilars Initiative:

For more information about biosimilars, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/pharmacare-for-bc-residents/what-we-cover/drug-coverage/biosimilars-initiative-patients>

Please forward this communication to all departments within your organization that may require and rely on this information.

Questions

For any questions or employee concerns, please contact your **PBC Pharmacy Services Team:** PharmacyServices@pac.bluecross.ca