Changes to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme eligibility for COVID-19 treatments

Information for prescribers and pharmacists

Changes to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) eligibility criteria for the COVID-19 treatments molnupiravir (Lagevrio®) and nirmatrelvir and ritonavir (Paxlovid®) take effect from 11 July 2022. Further detail on the changes is available in the PBAC Outcome Statement, molnupiravir (Lagevrio®) fact sheet (PDF) - (Word) and nirmatrelvir and ritonavir (Paxlovid®) fact sheet (PDF) - (Word).

From 11 July 2022, doctors and authorised nurse practitioners can prescribe these treatments according to the expanded PBS criteria, and pharmacists can dispense those PBS prescriptions. This is supported by the relevant legislative changes and a corresponding Addendum to the PBS schedule. However, prior to 1 August 2022:

- there will be no change to currently published restriction text or streamlined authority codes in the online version of the PBS schedule; and
- proprietary prescribing and dispensing software may not reflect the amended restrictions.

Prescribers

Until PBS prescribing, dispensing and claiming software is updated for 1 August 2022, prescribers are advised to access Lagevrio® or Paxlovid® restrictions via the existing streamlined codes, as per Table 1 below.

Table 1: Abridged restrictions and streamlined codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous Restriction Population</th>
<th>New Restriction Population from 11 July 2022</th>
<th>Current Streamlined Code to be used up to 31 July 2022</th>
<th>New Streamlined Code – use from 1 August 2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moderately to severely immunocompromised patients of at least 18 years of age</td>
<td>Moderately to severely immunocompromised patients of at least 18 years of age</td>
<td>12839</td>
<td>13110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander patients aged 50 or over and at high risk</td>
<td>Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander patients of at least 30 years of age and at high risk</td>
<td>12936</td>
<td>13107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patients aged 65 years or over and at high risk</td>
<td>Patients at least 50 years of age and at high risk</td>
<td>12923</td>
<td>13108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If prescribers would like to seek clarification on the PBS listing criteria, information can be found on [www.pbs.gov.au](http://www.pbs.gov.au) or by calling Services Australia (ph 132 290) or the Department of Health and Aged Care (ph 1800 020 613) directly.

Both the Department of Health and Aged Care and the manufacturers of these medicines (Merck Sharp & Dohme for Lagevrio®, Pfizer for Paxlovid®) continue to engage with GPs, and their peak bodies including the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, by conducting webinars, to encourage awareness of these medicines and their PBS eligibility criteria.

**Pharmacists**

**PBS claiming**

The expanded PBS criteria commences from 11 July 2022. For claiming these items up to 31 July 2022, please use the current streamlined item codes in the above table. PBS dispensing and claiming software will be updated as per usual for new streamlined item codes from 1 August 2022.

**Ensuring stock**

The Australian Government ensures all PBS-listed medicines can be supplied quickly to patients, via the Community Service Obligation (CSO) arrangement, with pharmaceutical wholesalers delivering the full range of PBS medicines and National Diabetes Services Scheme products, to patients via their community pharmacy, regardless of where they live and for most items within 24 hours.

Both Paxlovid® and Lagevrio® must be supplied by CSO Distributors to community pharmacies within 24 hours of order cut-off times, including for distribution to rural and remote locations.

Pharmacists are encouraged to stock these medicines on community pharmacy shelves. The Government has a wholesaler guarantee and special stock return policies to ensure pharmacies will not be left holding Paxlovid® courses if they are ordered, but not needed in that location. The sponsor of Lagevrio®, Merck Sharp & Dohme, has commercial arrangements about terms of trade and return policies.

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia has included both Paxlovid® and Lagevrio® on the Find a Pharmacy website, which allows patients to search for pharmacies near them that are holding stock of the medicine they require, increasing visibility and accessibility of stock. This function can be found on the Find a Pharmacy webpage at: [www.findapharmacy.com.au](http://www.findapharmacy.com.au/)