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Government urged to fund potentially lifesaving immunotherapy cancer medicines

MSD Australia today acknowledged the work being undertaken by Federal Health Minister, The Hon Greg Hunt MP to drive increased access to immuno-oncology (IO) medicines through a multi-cancer approach and urged the government to commit appropriate funds.

The current Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) process requires all new cancer treatments to be assessed on an individual tumour basis, resulting in delays in the approval of potentially lifesaving IO treatments¹.

Currently it takes approximately 18 months for individual new cancer treatments to be approved by the PBAC². A significant influx of submissions for IO treatments in the next few years are expected and if each submission is assessed separately it could result in some Australians with cancer unable to access IO treatments through the PBS³.

To help address this, the PBAC has a Special Meeting on 17 August 2018 to consider options submitted by industry, clinicians and patient groups. MSD submitted a proposal designed to potentially save or extend the lives of 40,000 cancer patients over the next four years⁴ to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) as part of the process to make Minister Hunt's initiative a reality. MSD has asked the PBAC and Minister Hunt ahead of this Special Meeting in August to make a positive recommendation for a multi-cancer approach based on proposals from the industry and other key stakeholders. MSD also asked that Minister Hunt expedite this process and attribute government funds so that a streamlined reimbursement approach could benefit patients as early as next year.

Michael Azrak, Managing Director of MSD Australia, said, "Over the next two years, we plan to make more than 20 IO submissions to the PBAC.⁵ In anticipation of this increase in IO submissions, the Federal Government has an opportunity to review this process and make it fit-for-purpose for Australian patients. Finding a streamlined process is needed now as it has the potential to benefit a large number of patients. We welcome the opportunity to work with the PBAC, Federal Government, industry and patient groups on potential solutions for a streamlined reimbursement system.

"Cancer affects almost every Australian in some way either through personal experience or that of a close family member or friend. We need to continue being at the forefront of access to cancer treatments available anywhere in the world," said Mr Azrak.

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About MSD

For more than a century, MSD, a leading global biopharmaceutical company, has been inventing for life, bringing forward medicines and vaccines for the world's most challenging diseases. MSD is a trade name of Merck & Co., Inc., with headquarters in Kenilworth, N.J., U.S.A. Through our prescription medicines, vaccines, biologic therapies and animal health products, we work with customers and operate in more than 140 countries to deliver innovative health solutions. We also demonstrate our commitment to increasing access to health care through far-reaching policies, programs and partnerships. Today, MSD continues to be at the forefront of research to advance the prevention and treatment of diseases that threaten people and communities around the world - including cancer, cardio-metabolic diseases, emerging animal diseases, Alzheimer's disease and infectious diseases including HIV and Ebola. For more information, visit www.msd-australia.com.au and connect with us on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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