

## MEDIA RELEASE

# PHARMAC FUNDS NEW TREATMENT OPTION FOR NEW ZEALANDERS LIVING WITH CHRONIC LYMPHOCYtic LEUKAEMIA

- *VENCLEXTA<sup>®</sup> (venetoclax) plus rituximab will be funded from 1 December 2019 for patients with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia who have relapsed within 36 months of previous treatment.<sup>1</sup>*
- *Every year in New Zealand around 120 people are diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL). It is the most common form of leukaemia in New Zealand.<sup>2</sup>*
- *VENCLEXTA is based on an Australian research discovery of a protein in the body called BCL-2 that helps CLL cells survive. Blocking this protein helps to kill and reduce the number of these cancer cells.<sup>3</sup>*

**Wednesday 30 October, Wellington 2019** – AbbVie (NYSE: ABBV) New Zealand welcomes PHARMAC's announcement that patients with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL) whose cancer has relapsed within 36 months of previous treatment will now have funded access to VENCLEXTA<sup>®</sup> (venetoclax) in combination with rituximab, from 1 December 2019.<sup>1</sup>

Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL) is a type of cancer affecting white blood cells called B-cells, and may also involve the lymph nodes. In CLL, the B-cells multiply too quickly and live too long, so that there are too many of them in the blood.<sup>3</sup>

Many people with chronic lymphocytic leukemia have no early symptoms. Those who do develop signs and symptoms may experience enlarged lymph nodes, fatigue, fever, night sweats, weight loss and frequent infections.<sup>4</sup>

Each year in New Zealand around 120 people are diagnosed with CLL, making it the most common type of leukaemia diagnosed in New Zealand.<sup>2</sup> Although diagnosed on occasion in adults aged 35-55 years, CLL usually affects people over 60 years of age, and is diagnosed more often in men than women.<sup>5</sup> CLL usually develops and progresses slowly over many months or years.<sup>2</sup>

VENCLEXTA<sup>®</sup> (venetoclax) is an oral targeted treatment that works by blocking a protein in the body ("BCL-2") that helps CLL cancer cells survive. Blocking this protein helps to kill and reduce the number of cancer cells, and may slow the spread of CLL.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pharmac.govt.nz/news/consultation-2019-09-01-venetoclax/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.leukaemia.org.nz/information/about-blood-cancers/leukaemia/chronic-lymphocytic-leukaemia/>

<sup>3</sup> Venclexta Consumer Information (CMI). Version 6. Updated May 2019 <https://medsafe.govt.nz/consumers/cmi/v/venclexta.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/chronic-lymphocytic-leukemia/symptoms-causes/syc-20352428> Accessed October 2019

<sup>5</sup> MOH Data on File 2019

Leading haematologist Dr Robert Weinkove says today's announcement is a major step forward for New Zealanders who are living with CLL. "Many people with early-stage CLL can be safely monitored by their GP, but most eventually need treatment. It's vital that we improve access to new targeted cancer medications so we can help New Zealanders with CLL."

VENCLEXTA was developed as part of a research collaboration between AbbVie, Genentech, a member of the Roche Group of Companies, and the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in Melbourne, Australia.

AbbVie New Zealand's General Manager, Andrew Tompkin, commended PHARMAC for recognising the unmet need of CLL patients in our community. "At AbbVie our goal is to provide medicines that make a transformational improvement in cancer treatment and outcomes for patients. Today's news that the funding of VENCLEXTA means that patients whose CLL has relapsed have another option where previously their treatment choices were limited."

### **IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT VENCLEXTA®**

Venclexta is a prescription medicine containing venetoclax, which blocks a protein that helps cancer cells survive. Venclexta is available as film-coated tablets of various strength (10 mg, 50 mg, 100 mg venetoclax). It is used, in combination with rituximab or alone, to treat a condition called "Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia. Your doctor will determine which treatment is suitable for your condition. Typically, you will begin treatment with Venclexta at a low dose for 1 week. Your doctor will gradually increase your dose over the following four weeks to the full standard dose. **Use strictly as directed by your doctor.**

Special prescribing restrictions apply. For full prescribing information talk to your doctor. Normal prescription charges and doctor's fees apply. Venclexta is available as film-coated tablets in strengths of 10 mg, 50 mg, 100 mg.

**Venclexta has risks and benefits.** You must not take it if you are allergic to venetoclax or to any of the inactive ingredients. Do not take it if you are taking certain medicines broken down in the liver, including: ketoconazole, posaconazole, voriconazole, itraconazole, clarithromycin or ritonavir. Do not drink grapefruit juice, or eat grapefruit, starfruit or Seville oranges or marmalades. Do not give Venclexta to children and adolescents under 18 years of age. Do not take Venclexta if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant, or if you are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. Tell your doctor if you have recently received or are scheduled for any vaccinations. **Venclexta can cause tumour lysis syndrome (TLS)**, which is caused by the fast breakdown of cancer cells. TLS is a very serious side effect that can be fatal. TLS is most likely to occur when you are first starting treatment. Tell your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you have or have had heart, kidney or liver problems. Let your healthcare provider know immediately if you experience: fever or chills, nausea or vomiting, confusion, shortness of breath, irregular heartbeat, dark or cloudy urine, fits or seizures, feeling unusually tired, or muscle pain or discomfort while on treatment with Venclexta. Ensure you follow all your doctor's instructions carefully. Tell your doctor

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immediately if you have signs of an infection before or while taking Venclexta, including fever, chills, feeling weak or confused, cough, or pain or burning feeling when passing urine. Some of the more common side effects of Venclexta include: feeling very tired, feeling sick, unusual weakness or lack of energy, tiredness, headaches, shortness of breath when exercising, dizziness and looking pale, diarrhoea, vomiting, decreased appetite, cough, difficulty breathing or chest tightness. Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you notice anything else that is making you feel unwell. Some medicines and Venclexta may interfere with each other, so tell your doctor if you are taking medicines containing any of the following: fluconazole, ciprofloxacin, erythromycin, azithromycin, nafcillin, rifampicin, carbamazepine, phenytoin, efavirenz, etravirine, captopril, carvedilol, felodipine, quinidine, ranolazine, bosentan, verapamil, diltiazem, modafinil, herbal medicines; St John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) and quercetin, warfarin, amiodarone, ticagrelor, digoxin, dronedarone, everolimus, sirolimus and ciclosporin. Tell any other doctors, pharmacists, dentists or surgeons treating you that you are taking Venclexta and remind them before you start any new medicines.

**If you have any questions about using Venclexta, including its risks and benefits, how much to use, how and when to use it, or storage conditions, ask your healthcare professional and refer to the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) available from [www.medsafe.govt.nz](http://www.medsafe.govt.nz) or free phone 0800 900 030. Ask your doctor if Venclexta is right for you. Use strictly as directed. If symptoms continue, or you have side effects, see your doctor, pharmacist or healthcare professional.**

Venclexta® is supplied in New Zealand by: AbbVie Limited, 6<sup>th</sup> floor, 156-158 Victoria Street, Wellington, 6011, New Zealand Tel: 0800 900 030. [MCMI Ver 4a]

### **About AbbVie in New Zealand**

AbbVie is a global, research-based biopharmaceutical company formed in 2013 following separation from Abbott Laboratories. The company's mission is to use its expertise, dedicated people and unique approach to innovation to develop and market advanced therapies that address some of the world's most complex and serious diseases. Together with its wholly-owned subsidiary, Pharmacyclics, AbbVie employs approximately 29,000 people worldwide and markets medicines in more than 170 countries.

Our heritage in New Zealand reaches back more than 70 years. We employ passionate people who contribute to the company's vision of making a remarkable impact on patient lives in our focus areas of Immunology, Liver Disease, Neuroscience and Oncology.

For further information, please visit [www.abbvie.co.nz](http://www.abbvie.co.nz). Follow @abbvie\_NZ or follow us on Facebook or our [LinkedIn](#) page.

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