

Patients welcome better access to Shingrix® for immunocompromised patients

Better Access Australia and **AusPIPS Inc** have welcomed the expanded access to subsidised Shingrix® for immunocompromised patients via the National Immunisation Program (NIP) from 30 August 2024.

AusPIPS Inc represents primary and secondary immunodeficient (PID SID) patients in Australia, and **Better Access Australia** works with patients groups to advocate for improved health, disability and social services in Australia.

Shingles is a painful and difficult disease, but the length and severity of the disease in immunocompromised people can often be compounded and exacerbate already complex health conditions.

AusPIP and BAA have been advocating for expanded access to Shingrix® after the 2023-24 federal budget funding decision limited access to only those *“immunocompromised patients aged 18 years and over with: haemopoietic stem cell transplant; solid organ transplant; haematological malignancy; and advanced or untreated HIV.”*

This denied funded access to patients with common and complex immunocompromised need patients like those with PID and SID. It also denied access to patients with immune system vulnerabilities as a result of treatments for common chronic diseases such as diabetes, arthritis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder and multiple sclerosis without subsidised access.

From 30 August 2024 NIP access to Shingrix® has been expanded to include anyone *“18 years and over considered at increased risk of herpes zoster due to an underlying condition and/or immunosuppressive treatments.”*¹

Quotes from AusPIPS and BAA

“The removal of this barrier to access to Shingrix® is an incredibly important step to improving the health of immunocompromised patients in the community,” AusPIPS President Jackie Murphy stated.

“COVID-19 showed the importance of timely, affordable access to preventive health care for those of us in the community who already spend too much time engaging with the health system,” Ms Murphy added.

“Patients with PID and SID have no immune system to fight infection, so vaccination is a first line protection for all of us, keeping us healthy, and saving the healthcare system thousands of dollars a day in hospital admission costs. AusPIPS thanks health ministers Butler, Thomas and Sanderson who heard our concerns, and worked with the department and GSK to make this possible.” Ms Murphy concluded.

“This is an important first step in recognising the value of adult vaccination in patient groups too long ignored, despite the lessons the COVID-19 pandemic taught us about the risk of viruses to older Australians, and those with already immunocompromised health,” Better Access Australia Chair Felicity McNeill PSM said

“BAA and AusPIPS have been working together since the draft NIP Strategy for 2025-30 was released, and was almost silent on the priority of medical need in those with immunocompromised health. Whilst we have achieved change for one vaccine, Shingrix®, we need reform for all current and future vaccines added to the NIP,” Ms McNeill added.

¹ [Shingles \(herpes zoster\) vaccine | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

“The Australian Immunisation Handbook is full of recommendations on administering a vaccine where no funding is available. With another whooping cough season in the community, how many are aware of the recommendation of a booster every 10 years and how many in the community can afford that vaccine?”
Ms McNeill asked

“This is why we welcome this expanded access to Shingrix® but will continue to seek reforms from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee, and vaccine sponsors to ensure a contemporary view of immunocompromised need for adult vaccination across all preventable diseases is the standard of care for access to adult immunisation on the NIP going forward.”

“BAA joins AusPIPs in thanking health ministers Butler, Sanderson and Thomas for not only their willingness to listen, but their willingness to take action. In particular, we thank ministers Sanderson [wa] and Thomas [vic] who have committed to resolving the broader issue of immunocompromised access to all adult vaccinations,” Ms McNeill concluded.

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QUICK FACTS

- Shingrix® was listed on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG) on 28 June 2018 for use in adults 50 years and over. An extension to include adults 18 years of age or older at increased risk of infection with the virus was approved 13 December 2021.
- For a vaccine to be listed on the National Immunisation Program (NIP) it must first be considered by *Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI)*.
- This advice is then considered by the *Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC)* along with a submission from the sponsor of the vaccine.
- A vaccine cannot be listed on the NIP for the first time without a positive PBAC recommendation. Amendments can thereafter be made without further reference to the PBAC but protocol is that expansions are not made without further consideration by the PBAC.
- Shingrix® was first considered by the PBAC in November 2018. The application was rejected.
- A new application was made to the PBAC in March 2023, and the vaccine was recommended for listing.
- The Government announced funding for the listing as part of the 2023-24 Budget and it was listed on 1 November 2023 (1950 days after it was first registered on the ARTG and 687 days after the extended registration).
- The PBAC considered two further submissions in July 2023 and November 2023 for a broader patient population that the PBAC had previously acknowledged might benefit from and be considered cost effective access to Shingrix®
- The 30 August 2024 expanded listing is (989 days after it was included on the ARTG).
- In May 2024 the Government conducted an initial consultation on the NIP Strategy for 2025-30. Medical need was a low priority in the Strategy
- The ATAGI had intended to consult on the Australian Immunisation Handbook Chapter on immunocompromised need in July 2024. This has been delayed with no updated timeframe for the consultation

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