



**ANZCA**  
FPM

*Te Whare Tohu o  
Te Hau Whakaora*

30 May 2025

Pharmac *Te Pātaka Whaioranga*

By email: [consult@Pharmac.govt.nz](mailto:consult@Pharmac.govt.nz)

Tēnā koe

### Proposal to amend access to COVID-19 antivirals and change supply and reimbursement

#### About the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA)

ANZCA, which includes the Faculty of Pain Medicine and Chapter of Perioperative Medicine, is the leading authority on anaesthesia, pain medicine and perioperative medicine. It is the professional organisation responsible for postgraduate training programs of anaesthetists and specialist pain medicine physicians, and for setting the standards of clinical practice throughout Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Our collective membership comprises 9649 fellows and trainees in anaesthesia and pain medicine, of which about 1300 work in Aotearoa New Zealand. ANZCA is committed to upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi in the provision of competent, culturally safe care, and to promoting best practice and ongoing continuous improvement in a high-quality health system.

#### Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the above proposal. This submission is informed by feedback and discussion with members and staff in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

ANZCA welcomes and **supports** the proposal to increase access to COVID-19 antivirals nirmatrelvir with ritonavir (branded as Paxlovid) and remdesivir (branded as Veklury) to all people aged 50 years or older with COVID-19 who are considered by their health practitioner to be at high risk of hospitalisation or death from COVID-19. This makes funded access to COVID-19 consistent for all populations aged 50 and above.

However, it does not maintain earlier access for Māori and Pacific peoples in recognition of significant disparities in their health outcomes, including substantially higher risks of hospitalisation and death from COVID-19, compared with European and other ethnicities<sup>1</sup>. The estimated 40-60% reduction in mortality risk for most age groups with oral antivirals<sup>2</sup> indicates that retaining a lower age differential for Māori and Pacific peoples, whose average life expectancy is six – eight years less, is likely to be a practical cost-effective way of reducing health inequalities.

ANZCA **recommends** that you follow Australia's lead in extending funding to antiviral treatments for COVID-19 at an earlier age for these vulnerable populations. Currently in Australia antivirals

<sup>1</sup> S. Jefferies, C. Gilkison, P. Duff, C. Grey, N. French, H. Carr, P. Priest, S. Crengle, Ethnic equity in Aotearoa New Zealand's COVID-19 response: A descriptive epidemiological study, *Public Health*, Volume 244, 2025, 105732, ISSN 0033-3506, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2025.105732>.

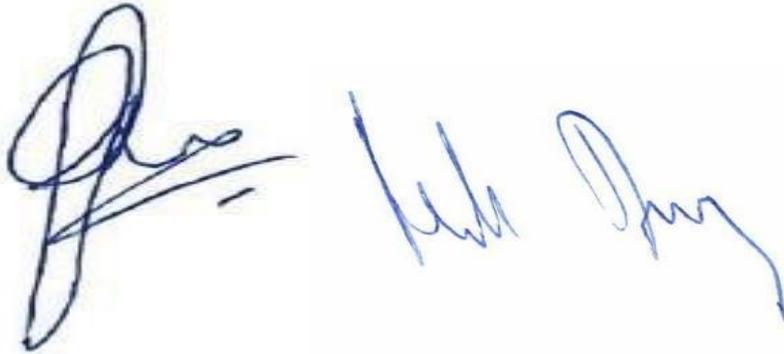
<sup>2</sup> Deputy Director General of Health to Dr Ayesha Verrall, Minister of Health. The effect of COVID-19 oral antivirals on hospitalisation and mortality in Aotearoa New Zealand: Briefing. Te Pou Hauora Tūmatanui/ Public Health Agency. P1/21.

are funded for people 30 years of age or older identifying as First Nations people with one risk factor for developing severe disease<sup>3</sup>.

Lowering the age for antiviral access for Māori and Pacific peoples to 30 years, for instance, would enable direct comparisons with the population >50 years to determine if there is any advantage to be gained by Māori and Pacific peoples. It is not clear whether these direct comparisons have been made with the current age differential (50 years for Māori and Pacific peoples vs 65 years), but we suggest it would be useful to understand the impact of policy changes on antiviral access and health outcomes specific to Aotearoa New Zealand's population and health system.

Thank you again.

Nāku noa, nā



**Dr Graham Roper**  
Chair  
New Zealand National Committee

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Health and Aged Care. COVID-19 Vaccination and antiviral treatments: Information for residents living in aged care homes and their families and carers [Internet]. Canberra: Australian Government; 2024 Oct. 5 p. Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-10/fact-sheet-for-residents-and-families-on-covid-19-vaccination-and-antivirals.pdf>