

BC PharmaCare

Biosimilars Initiative

The Biosimilars Initiative transfers PharmaCare coverage from originator biologic medications to equally safe and effective biosimilar versions.

Biosimilars cost less than originator biologics. In the first five years of the Biosimilars Initiative, which launched in 2019, B.C. has saved \$732 million. The savings have been reinvested in PharmaCare coverage of other drugs and medical devices, such as continuous and flash glucose monitors, inhalers for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, the drug dapagliflozin to treat type 2 diabetes and heart failure, and Trikafta to treat cystic fibrosis.

Over 40,000 BC residents have switched from an originator biologic to a biosimilar.

Six-month switch period

Once PharmaCare decides to cover a Health Canada-approved biosimilar, patients have six months to transition from the originator biologic version, to keep their PharmaCare coverage. After the switch period ends, PharmaCare only covers the biosimilar version(s).

How to keep PharmaCare coverage

1. Make an appointment with your prescriber during the six-month switch period
2. Your prescriber can explain the switch process, discuss your biosimilar option(s), and write you a new prescription. You may also want to talk to your pharmacist
3. Make sure you have a new prescription before the end of the switch period

Being aware of the nocebo effect when switching

Your mindset can influence your symptoms and sense of well-being. The nocebo effect is when negative expectations lead to negative outcomes. Misinformation from a variety of sources can cause a nocebo effect.

To combat a potential nocebo effect, you can:

- Acknowledge the nocebo effect
- Seek out more information on biosimilars
- Speak to your pharmacist or prescriber about biosimilars
- Keep a positive or neutral outlook

People who can't switch to a biosimilar

Some people cannot switch to a biosimilar for medical reasons. Your prescriber can help you determine if it is medically necessary for you to remain on the originator medication. If it is, they can submit a [Special Authority \(SA\)](#) request asking PharmaCare to consider continued coverage of the originator. SA requests are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Biosimilars and originator biologics

Biologic drugs are created from living organisms like yeast and bacteria. The first version of a biologic is known as the "originator" or "reference drug." This is because they are the original biologic version of a drug that a biosimilar is based on.

As patents expire for originator drugs, other manufacturers may produce new, similar versions. These new versions are called biosimilars. Since originator drugs are complex, biosimilars can be highly similar but not identical. Many studies comparing biosimilars to the originator drugs have found them to be as safe and effective.

There are very small differences between different batches of an originator drug. This is because they are made using living organisms with some tiny natural differences. The same goes for the slight differences between a biosimilar and its originator drug, which are also not clinically meaningful.

For more information and the dates for switch periods

Visit gov.bc.ca/biosimilarsforpatients for more resources, or contact the biosimilars team by:

- **Phone:** 1-844-915-5005 (Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm)
- **Email:** Biosimilars.Initiative@gov.bc.ca