

# Biosimilars Initiative

## Etanercept

***BC PharmaCare coverage is changing for people who take Enbrel® for***

- *rheumatoid arthritis*
- *ankylosing spondylitis*
- *psoriatic arthritis*

***Meet with your prescriber or pharmacist before November 26 to discuss switching to a new version of your medication.***

### **What is changing?**

PharmaCare now covers the Erelzi™ and Brenzys® brands of etanercept instead of Enbrel® brand.

If you currently use Enbrel for rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, or psoriatic arthritis, and depend on PharmaCare coverage for your medications, you should make an appointment with your prescriber to discuss switching. If you take Enbrel for plaque psoriasis, you will not be affected at this time.

Between May 27 and November 25, 2019, anyone with existing Special Authority coverage for Enbrel will have coverage for all three brands, to provide time to switch to the new version of your medication.

As of November 26, 2019, PharmaCare will cover only Erelzi and Brenzys for patients with rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, or psoriatic arthritis.

### **Why is PharmaCare coverage changing?**

As new treatments are developed, PharmaCare must review which drugs are covered and carefully consider how to best meet the needs of B.C. residents.

Since the introduction of biologic drugs in the 1980s, these treatments have become the biggest drug expense in Canada. As patents on biologic drugs begin to expire, other manufacturers can start producing a highly similar version of the medication, with no differences in effect, at a much lower cost. These versions are called biosimilars.

Enbrel is PharmaCare's fifth-largest drug expense. By switching to a biosimilar version, you are helping save millions of dollars every year. This is an opportunity to maximize resources, expand coverage for new treatments, and improve patient access to more medications.

### **Will I be affected?**

You will be affected if you

- have rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, or psoriatic arthritis
- currently use Enbrel
- receive PharmaCare coverage

People using Enbrel for plaque psoriasis are not affected by biosimilar switching at this time.

## What are biologic and biosimilar drugs?

Biologic drugs are medications made by using living organisms (such as yeast or animal cells) to produce complex proteins that are purified and injected to affect certain processes in the human body.

Biosimilar drugs are designed to be as safe and effective as the original biologic (originator) drug, and to treat the same conditions. Because the production of biologics is complicated and the molecules themselves are complex, an originator and biosimilar are very similar, but not identical.

To be approved in Canada, a biosimilar must be proven to have no clinically meaningful differences from the originator. Studies must show that there are no differences in outcomes for patients taking the biosimilar compared to those taking the originator drug.

Enbrel is the brand name for the originator version of etanercept. Biosimilar versions of etanercept are available under the brand names Erelzi and Brenzys.

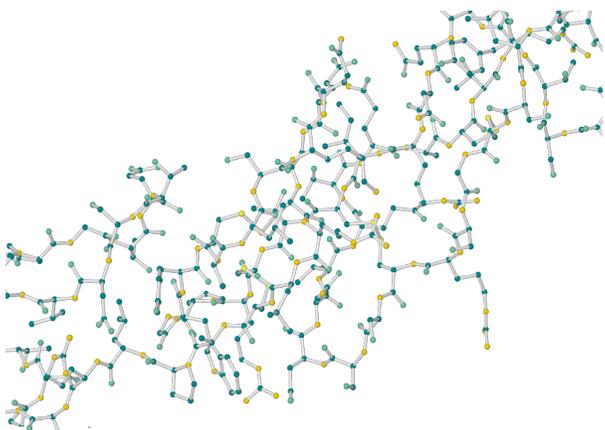
Health Canada supports switching from an originator to a biosimilar, recommending that the decision to switch be made by the prescriber and patient, taking into account the biosimilar policy in their province.

## How do I maintain my coverage?

To maintain your coverage:

1. Make an appointment with the medical practitioner who prescribes your Enbrel (i.e. your rheumatologist).
2. Discuss switching to Erelzi or Brenzys with your prescriber or pharmacist. (Note: Only your prescriber can write a new prescription.)
3. Your prescriber will guide you through the switching process, register you with the new patient support program (if requested), write you a new prescription, and answer any questions you may have.
4. Ensure that you have spoken with your prescriber and initiated your switch to a biosimilar by November 25, 2019.

*PharmaCare recognizes that some patients have exceptional medical requirements that may prevent switching to a biosimilar at this time. Your prescriber will assist you in determining whether it may be medically necessary to request exceptional Special Authority approval for continued coverage of Enbrel.*



### Where can I get further information?

Visit [www.gov.bc.ca/biosimilars](http://www.gov.bc.ca/biosimilars) for detailed information on

- the Biosimilars Initiative
- how you may be affected
- biologic and biosimilar drugs
- PharmaCare evidence-informed decisions
- frequently asked questions
- other resources

**Still have questions? Contact us at [Biosimilars.Initiative@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Biosimilars.Initiative@gov.bc.ca)**