



## Media Statement

6 October 2020

### **Investment in liver cancer medicines matched with prevention are changing Australian lives**

Hepatitis Australia welcomes the Australian Government's significant investment of \$230 million to expand the listing of Tecentriq® and Avastin® (atezolizumab and bevacizumab) on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) for use in combination to treat patients with advanced unresectable (inoperable) hepatocellular carcinoma.

"Hepatitis B and C are Australia's leading causes of liver cancer, and liver cancer is the fastest increasing cause of cancer mortality in Australia," said Carrie Fowlie, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Hepatitis Australia, the national peak body for viral hepatitis.

"Inoperable hepatocellular carcinoma is the most common form of liver cancer with tragically one of the lowest survival rates of all cancers." said Ms Fowlie

"Hepatitis Australia called for the listing of these life changing liver cancer medicines on the PBS, and congratulates the Minister for Health Greg Hunt and the Australian Government for taking action."

"These liver cancer medicines are shown to increase survival rates, decrease disease progression, and provide more time with higher quality of life and physical functioning for patients."

"Hepatitis Australia applauds the Australian Government's commitment to affordable medicines, and to improve the health outcomes for people impacted by viral hepatitis."

"Hepatitis Australia supports the Australian Government's commitment to cancer prevention is calling for hepatitis-related cancer prevention to be a key element of the National Preventive Health Strategy."

"Effective and accessible prevention interventions are crucial to Australia's comprehensive cancer response. For liver cancer, this means hepatitis related harm reduction, hepatitis B vaccinations, testing, early diagnosis, treatment and care."

"We congratulate Australian governments for their commitment to eliminate hepatitis by 2030. Hepatitis elimination is achievable and is essential to preventing liver cancer," said Ms Fowlie.

"Hepatitis Australia stands with the Australian Government in ensuring the National Hepatitis Strategies' 2022 targets are implemented to prevent cancer and improve the health and wellbeing of all Australians impacted by viral hepatitis," said Ms Fowlie.

*The National Hepatitis Infoline provides free, confidential support. Call 1800 437 222 to talk to someone in your State or Territory.*

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## Attachment:

### Background information for the media about the PBS listing of Tecentriq® (atezolizumab) and Avastin® (bevacizumab) for the treatment of people with newly diagnosed, inoperable hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC)

(6 October 2020)

#### New medicines listed on the PBS

- From 1 November 2020, PBS listings for Tecentriq® (atezolizumab) and Avastin® (bevacizumab) will be expanded for use in combination to treat patients with advanced unresectable (inoperable) hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC).
- Unresectable HCC is the most common form of liver cancer and has one of the lowest survival rates of all cancer types.
- The funding for these changes were announced as part of the Australian Federal Health Budget 2020.
- Australia will be the first country in the world to have this combination treatment publically funded for this type of liver cancer.
- Phase 3 trials showed these drugs led to increased survival rates, decreased disease progression and more time with higher quality of life and physical functioning for patients.
- These medicines are expected to positively impact the lives of people living with inoperable liver cancer resulting from hepatitis B and hepatitis C – both leading causes of liver cancer – and other causes.

#### Liver cancer in Australia

- Liver cancer is the fastest growing cause of cancer-related deaths in Australia.<sup>1</sup>
- In a period of 50 years up to 2016, the liver cancer mortality rate increased by 670 per cent from 1.0 to 7.7 per 100,000 people.<sup>2</sup>
- It was estimated there are 2,662 new cases of liver cancer and 2,297 liver cancer deaths in 2020.<sup>3</sup>

#### Liver cancer and hepatitis

- Hepatitis B and hepatitis C are blood borne viruses, which affect the liver. They are leading causes of liver cancer in Australia.
- On 1 March 2016, new hepatitis C medicines listed on the PBS provided a highly effective cure for hepatitis C.
  - Following their listing, the number of cases of hepatitis C -related cirrhosis (common precursory to HCC) decreased by 64 per cent from 2015 to 2018.<sup>4</sup>
  - The number of hepatitis C related deaths decreased by 45 per cent from 740 to 410 in the same period.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health and Human Services Victoria. 2015. Optimal cancer care pathway for people with hepatocellular carcinoma. Available at: <https://www.cancer.org.au/assets/pdf/hepatocellular-carcinoma-optimal-cancer-care-pathway>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2018 Cancer Data in Australia; Australian Cancer Incidence and Mortality (ACIM) books: liver cancer. Canberra. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/4fbc3f30-13b2-41bf-a03e-ee075e4e60f5/liver-cancer-acim.xlsx.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Australian Government, Cancer Australia. 2020. Liver Cancer in Australia Statistics. Available at: <https://www.canceraustralia.gov.au/affected-cancer/cancer-types/liver-cancer/statistics>

<sup>4</sup> The Kirby Institute. 2020. National update on HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections in Australia 2009-2018. Available from: <https://kirby.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/kirby/report/National-update-on-HIV-viral-hepatitis-and-STIs-2009-2018.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

- For people with chronic hepatitis B, there is no curative therapy. Antiviral medications can manage the effects of the virus.
  - Hepatitis B attributed deaths decreased by 4 per cent in 12 months between 2017 and 2018, and (from 452 to 435) and by 19 per cent in 5 years (from 534 in 2013).<sup>6</sup>
  - Approximately three quarters (3/4) of the 435 hepatitis B attributable deaths in 2018 were a result of HCC.<sup>7</sup>

### **Key messages**

- It is expected these expanded drug listings will have positive outcomes for people living with hepatitis B and hepatitis C, leading to lower mortality rates and extended quality of life.
- Hepatitis B vaccination, testing, diagnosis and treatment can prevent liver disease and liver cancer.
- Hepatitis C testing, diagnosis and curative treatments can prevent liver disease and liver cancer.
- Ongoing work is needed to achieve Australia's commitment to the elimination of hepatitis B and hepatitis C by 2030. While good progress has been made to implement Australia's national hepatitis strategies, we risk falling behind and in doing so will see more preventable deaths from liver disease and liver cancer as a result of these viruses.

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<sup>6</sup> Doherty Institute. 2019. National Surveillance for Hepatitis B Indicators. Available at: [https://www.doherty.edu.au/uploads/content\\_doc/National\\_Surveillance\\_for\\_Hepatitis\\_B\\_Indicators\\_2018.pdf](https://www.doherty.edu.au/uploads/content_doc/National_Surveillance_for_Hepatitis_B_Indicators_2018.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.