

31 May 2023

PHARMAC  
PO Box 10254  
The Terrace  
Wellington 6143

Sent via email to: [consult@pharmac.govt.nz](mailto:consult@pharmac.govt.nz)

Dear sir/madam,

**Re: Proposal to phase out funding of food thickeners in the community**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the above consultation.

The Pharmacy Guild of New Zealand (Inc.) (the Guild) is a national membership organisation representing the majority of community pharmacy owners. We provide leadership on all issues affecting the sector and advocate for the business and professional interests of community pharmacy.

Our feedback on this consultation focuses on Guild members' concerns around general economic, funding and supply issues. Guild submissions should not be taken as any endorsement of, or any attempt to comment on, issues of safety, efficacy or individual patient utility.

We do not support the phasing out of funding of food thickeners in the community. Even though this change will only affect a small number of patients, the effect on these patients' lives will be tremendous and far reaching.

Food thickeners are essential to avoid occurrence of choking, aspiration, dehydration, malnutrition, and other health concerns for patients who are living with dysphagia. The decision to place someone on long term thickened fluids is usually made clinically with an individualised swallowing assessment, often in consultation with the person, whanau and medical team, and food thickeners are widely recommended in guidelines in New Zealand, Australia, the United States and United Kingdom.

Being able to taste flavours that are known and familiar greatly enhance compliance and adherence to dietary requirements for patients by preserving a sense of enjoyment during liquid food consumption. Food thickeners are an additional cost for these patients to safely live their 'normal' daily life and ongoing and additional funding of thickeners will assist more people to live a more dignified and healthier life.

It is our opinion that the continuation of funding for food thickeners would play a major role in preventing specific groups of patients from requiring enteral feeding (PEG lines, etc.) or enteral nutrition sooner, leading to increased costs and hospitalisation. It is our belief that Pharmac should in fact consider expanding the eligibility for the funding of these products, increasing accessibility.

Thank you for your consideration of our response. If you have any questions about our feedback, please contact our Senior Advisory Pharmacists, Martin Lowis ([martin@pgnz.org.nz](mailto:martin@pgnz.org.nz), 04 802 8218) or Cathy Martin ([cathy@pgnz.org.nz](mailto:cathy@pgnz.org.nz), 04 802 8214).

Yours sincerely,



**Nicole Rickman**  
General Manager – Membership and Professional Services