

18 February 2025

PHARMAC
PO Box 10254
The Terrace
Wellington 6143

Sent via email to: consult@pharmac.govt.nz

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Proposal to fund the contraceptive pill desogestrel (Cerazette)

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

Our submission 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 strongly support the proposal to fully fund desogestrel (Cerazette), a progestogen-only contraceptive pill, that offers greater effectiveness in preventing ovulation and increased flexibility for missed doses. This funding would significantly enhance access to a broader range of contraception options, reduce financial barriers, and enhance reproductive health outcomes for individuals throughout the motu.

We outline the reasons for our support below:

- **Expanded access to oral contraceptive options:** Fully funding desogestrel (Cerazette) will provide individuals with a broader range of contraceptive choices, ensuring they can select an option that best suits their health needs and personal preferences. This is particularly important for those who require or prefer a progestogen-only pill, such as individuals with contraindications to combined oral contraceptives, including those with migraines, cardiovascular risks, or breastfeeding. Increased access to this alternative will enhance patient autonomy, allowing for more tailored contraceptive care.
- **Enhanced accessibility and equity:** Removing cost barriers will enable more individuals, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds, to access this essential medicine without financial strain, supporting public health goals of equitable reproductive healthcare and empowering individuals to make informed contraceptive choices based on their medical needs and lifestyle preferences rather than financial limitations.
- **Improved adherence:** Fully funding desogestrel may help reduce financial and logistical barriers, improving consistent contraceptive use and lowering the risk of missed doses and unintended pregnancies, supporting better reproductive health outcomes and empowering individuals to maintain control over their contraceptive choices without cost-related concerns. This funding may also ease pressure on healthcare services by preventing

contraception-related health complications and unplanned pregnancies, contributing to a more sustainable and efficient healthcare system.

- **Streamlining supply and reduction in financial barriers:** Community pharmacies play a crucial role as a primary access point for contraceptive consultations and dispensing, offering convenience and accessibility for patients. By fully funding desogestrel, the supply process would be streamlined, reducing financial barriers that often prevent individuals from accessing the contraceptive options they need. This would eliminate the need for pharmacists to have difficult conversations with patients about affordability and alternatives, ensuring that patients can confidently access their preferred method of contraception without delay.

Additional considerations

- **Improving access to desogestrel:** Enabling pharmacist prescribers and accredited community pharmacists to supply desogestrel under standing orders or future prescribing pathways would significantly improve access to contraception, making it more readily available and easing the burden on general practice services. This would provide patients with a more flexible, accessible option for contraceptive care, particularly in areas where access to GPs may be limited. By providing a convenient alternative for patients to access contraception directly from pharmacies, the need for GP appointments for contraceptive prescriptions would decrease, enabling them to focus on more complex medical issues. This shift would contribute to a more efficient, accessible primary healthcare system, optimising overall resource allocation and reducing waiting times for patients in need of other types of care.
- **Public awareness and education:** Pharmac, in partnership with healthcare providers such as community pharmacies, has a valuable opportunity to raise awareness about the availability of funded desogestrel. Through targeted public education campaigns, patients could be informed about the benefits, proper usage, and potential side effects of this contraceptive option. By fostering a better understanding of desogestrel, including its flexibility and suitability for various health needs, individuals will be better equipped to make informed decisions about their contraceptive choices. In addition, these educational efforts could address common misconceptions, encourage responsible use, and ultimately improve reproductive health outcomes.

If you have any questions about our feedback, please contact our Senior Advisory Pharmacists, Martin Lewis (martin@pgnz.org.nz, 04 802 8218) or Cathy Martin (cathy@pgnz.org.nz, 04 802 8214).

Yours sincerely,



Nicole Rickman

General Manager – Membership and Professional Services