

Société Alzheimer Society

CANADA

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Alzheimer Society of Canada's Response to Health Canada's Approval of Lecanemab

Health Canada's welcomed approval of lecanemab marks the first new treatment for Alzheimer's disease in more than a decade – and the first to target the underlying biology of the disease. While not a cure, and only for people with mild cognitive impairment or early-stage Alzheimer's disease (mild dementia due to Alzheimer's disease) this decision represents an important advancement in how we approach treatment and care.

Clinical studies show that lecanemab can help slow decline in memory, thinking and daily activities for people with mild cognitive impairment or early-stage Alzheimer's disease. As the treatment is only approved for this group and requires careful monitoring for safety risks, access to a timely diagnosis, appropriate imaging and trained health-care providers are essential if Canadians are to benefit fully from the treatment.

Health Canada's decision to limit lecanemab access to people who are *non-carriers* of the APOE4 gene or *heterozygotes* acknowledges the higher potential risk of serious side effects among people who are carriers of the APOE4 gene. Research shows that this group faces a much higher risk of brain swelling and small brain bleeds when taking the medication. While this restriction aligns with international standards, it means more Canadians will need genetic testing to find out if they're eligible for treatment. Unfortunately, access to this testing varies across provinces and territories, which could delay treatment access for some people. The Alzheimer Society of Canada supports expanding testing capacity and ensuring fair access so that eligibility can be determined quickly and equitably. While this approval is a significant step, it does not yet guarantee coverage under public drug plans. Canada's Drug Agency (CDA-AMC) will now decide if it should be paid for by the government. After that, each province and territory will decide on pricing and coverage.

In Canada, it can take up to two years after regulatory approval for new medicines to become publicly covered, while people with private or extended benefits often gain access much sooner. The Alzheimer Society of Canada urges faster, more coordinated reimbursement processes so that approval translates into timely, equitable access for all Canadians.

As Canada prepares to make this medication available, ensuring equitable access is key. Lecanemab, which is administered intravenously, requires safety monitoring through regular MRIs, which are not



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readily available to people living outside of large urban centres. In addition, it will be important to evaluate effectiveness in populations that were not well represented in clinical trials.

The Alzheimer Society of Canada will continue to advocate for these changes, while working with Alzheimer Societies across Canada to provide trusted information, services, and programs for people living with dementia and their caregivers.



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