

CONSUMER MEDIA RELEASE

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## **Australians living with an incurable blood cancer set to receive new reimbursed treatment option**

Australians living with the incurable blood cancer, multiple myeloma<sup>1</sup> are set to gain access to a new treatment option, with the listing of REVLIMID® (lenalidomide) for maintenance treatment on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) from Wednesday April 1, 2020.<sup>2</sup>

REVLIMID® (lenalidomide) represents Australia's first and only maintenance treatment specifically indicated and reimbursed for those newly diagnosed with multiple myeloma (NDMM) who have undergone an autologous stem cell transplant (ASCT).<sup>2, 3</sup>

This announcement coincides with an article just published in Medical Journal of Australia's *MJA Insight*, calling for timely access to effective treatments for those living with multiple myeloma.<sup>4</sup>

According to article author, Professor Miles Prince, Clinical Haematologist and Director of Cancer Immunology and Molecular Oncology (Epworth Healthcare, Melbourne), continuing to broaden access to multiple myeloma treatments is critical to improving patient quality of life.<sup>4</sup>

"Currently, people living with myeloma have a median survival rate of more than seven years which is significant in comparison to the median survival rate of just three years in the early 2000s.<sup>4</sup>

"For survival rates to continue to improve however, patients must receive timely access to the most effective treatments," said Prof. Prince.

"The PBS listing of maintenance for multiple myeloma will provide newly diagnosed patients with an additional treatment option for their disease."

Not to be confused with the skin cancer, melanoma, multiple myeloma is an incurable blood cancer that develops from plasma cells, a type of white blood cell found in the bone marrow.<sup>5, 6</sup>

Representing Australia's third most common blood cancer (after lymphoma and leukaemia),<sup>7, 8</sup> approximately 18,000 Australians are living with multiple myeloma at any given time,<sup>1</sup> only half of whom will survive five years post- diagnosis.<sup>9</sup>

Myeloma Australia CEO, Steve Roach, today welcomed the availability of a new treatment option for the incurable disease.

"The multiple myeloma patient journey involves a pattern of Response, Remission and Relapse, with individuals responding differently to certain treatments due to the complex nature of the devastating disease.

"Additional treatment options are required throughout the patient journey, for both the newly diagnosed, and those who have already commenced therapy. Although incurable, we hope that multiple myeloma will one day be treated as a chronic, rather than a terminal disease," Mr Roach said.

The incurable nature of the disease and the likelihood of relapse, may have a psychological impact on patients, who can continue to live in fear even during periods of remission.<sup>10, 11</sup>

With studies revealing more than half (52%) of those living with multiple myeloma experience symptoms of anxiety or depression,<sup>12</sup> improving access to treatment, and extending time spent in remission, may help to improve psychological wellbeing.

Wife and mother-to-two, Maria (53) was diagnosed with multiple myeloma in December 2018 and found her initial diagnosis very overwhelming.

“When my husband Danny and I first heard the diagnosis, we were completely overwhelmed. We didn’t know what Myeloma was and we didn’t know what this meant short or long term. I didn’t know if I was going to die in a month, a year or 10 years. How on earth was I going to tell everyone I had cancer,” said Maria.

“During my journey I blogged about my experience with multiple myeloma and posted to my Facebook daily to keep the calls and fears of my family and friends at bay. I have since accepted that myeloma is now a part of my life. I have no anger or fear and instead just live in the moment and take one day at a time.

“It’s very exciting to see new treatment options for multiple myeloma being funded by the government, and I hope to keep raising awareness, to ensure the myeloma community continues to receive access to the best treatment options available,” Maria said.

### **About multiple myeloma**

Multiple myeloma is a cancer that develops from abnormal plasma cells. A plasma cell is a type of white blood cell found in the bone marrow, that forms part of the immune system and helps to protect against infection.<sup>4, 7</sup> The abnormal plasma cells crowd the bone marrow and make it difficult to produce enough normal blood cells.<sup>7</sup>

Multiple myeloma can be challenging to diagnose due to its wide range of symptoms, including high blood calcium levels, anaemia, fatigue, kidney failure, recurrent infections and bone pain.<sup>6</sup>

Current treatment for multiple myeloma includes a continuous approach, often comprising initial therapy, consolidation maintenance, and salvage therapy.<sup>13</sup> Treatment options for multiple myeloma include chemotherapy, corticosteroids, autologous stem cell transplant (ASCT), immunomodulating drugs (IMiDs) monoclonal antibodies therapy, and proteasome inhibitors.<sup>14, 15</sup>

### **About REVLIMID® (lenalidomide)**

Representing an oral medication approved for the treatment of relapsed myeloma over 10 years ago,<sup>16</sup> REVLIMID® is an immunomodulating agent (IMiD) that slows the growth of multiple myeloma plasma tumour cells and proteins known to play a key role in multiple myeloma, delays the development of new blood vessels, and enhances immune function.<sup>3</sup>

The most commonly reported side-effects of REVLIMID® include diarrhoea, constipation, nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, indigestion, dehydration, dry mouth, mouth ulcer, sore mouth, increase or decrease in weight, increase or decrease in appetite, loss of taste, itchiness, rash, redness of the skin, dry skin, bruising, excessive sweating, dizziness, fainting, headache, shaking or tremors, unusual weakness, night sweats, reduced sense of touch, difficulty sleeping, depression, anxiety, feeling of confusion, back pain, muscle spasms, muscle and/or joint pain, swollen joints, bone pain, muscular weakness, pain in the extremities, feeling tired, falling, swelling of hands, ankles or feet.<sup>17</sup>

Other possible side effects of REVLIMID® include heart palpitations or fast heartbeat, chest pains, dizziness or fainting, shortness of breath, weakness or reduced ability to exercise, bleeding (including nose-bleeds), bruising more than usual, numbness, tingling, blurred vision or difficulty seeing, passing large amounts of urine, excessive thirst, and having a dry mouth and skin, abnormal eye movements, convulsions, mood changes, irregular heart rhythms or tender swollen lymph nodes.<sup>17</sup>

All patients receiving REVLIMID® must be registered on, and abide by the requirements of, i-access® risk management program to avoid exposure to unborn babies, due to the potential for birth defects. It is important to note that a small number of patients with multiple myeloma may develop additional types of cancer, regardless of their type of therapy. At this stage, it cannot be excluded that this risk may be slightly increased with REVLIMID® maintenance treatment.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Disclosure**

Celgene supports disclosure and transparency on interactions between the healthcare industry and healthcare professionals to ensure public trust and confidence. No expert spokespeople have been offered compensation for their involvement in this media campaign. All expert spokespeople have been briefed on the approved use of these products and their obligations with regard to promotion to the general public. Prof Miles Prince and Myeloma Australia have received funding from Celgene for projects unrelated to this announcement. All opinions expressed are their own.

#### **About Celgene**

Celgene, a Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, is an integrated global biopharmaceutical company engaged primarily in the discovery, development and commercialisation of innovative therapies for the treatment of cancer and inflammatory diseases, through next-generation solutions in protein homeostasis, immuno-oncology, epigenetics, immunology and neuro-inflammation. For more information, visit [www.celgene.com.au](http://www.celgene.com.au)

#### **About Bristol-Myers Squibb**

Bristol-Myers Squibb is a global biopharmaceutical company whose mission is to discover, develop and deliver innovative medicines that help patients prevail over serious diseases. For more information about Bristol-Myers Squibb, visit us at [www.bms.com/au](http://www.bms.com/au)

#### **About Myeloma Australia**

Myeloma Australia is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to facilitating myeloma research in Australia, supporting and informing those living with the disease, and educating those involved in its care and treatment. Myeloma Australia is determined to raise community awareness and understanding of myeloma, and to improve patient access to the latest treatments at affordable prices.

**-ends-**

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#### **AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW:**

- **Professor Miles Prince**, Clinical Haematologist & Director of Cancer Immunology & Molecular Oncology, Epworth Healthcare, **MELBOURNE**
- **Mr Steve Roach**, CEO Myeloma Australia, **MELBOURNE**
- **Maria, 53**, diagnosed with multiple myeloma in 2018, **MELBOURNE**

**DIGITAL MEDIA KIT:** [www.myelomamediakit.com.au](http://www.myelomamediakit.com.au)

Further information is available on request from Bristol-Myers Squibb Australia Pty Ltd, ABN 33 004 333 322, Level 2, 4 Nexus Court, Mulgrave, VIC, 3170. ®Registered Trademark. PM-AU-REV-0059 Prepared: February 2020.

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