

Subject: Biosimilar Initiative

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**MESSAGE:**

On December 12, 2019, the Minister of Health made an announcement regarding the *Biosimilar Initiative*. This was introduced as a cost-saving initiative which will impact adult Albertans currently enrolled in a government sponsored drug plan and who are prescribed specific **biologic** drugs for certain health conditions.

Alberta's *Biosimilar Initiative* will expand the use of **biosimilars** by replacing the use of **biologic** drugs with their **biosimilar** versions whenever possible. A **biosimilar** drug is a highly similar version of a **biologic** drug, known as an originator drug, but less expensive. This means patients will continue receiving the same safe and effective treatment, but at a lower cost.

Switching to **biosimilars** will save between \$227 million and \$380 million over the next 4 years once fully implemented.

There are close to 5,000 low-income clients impacted by this initiative and must switch from their **biologic** version to the **biosimilar** version by July 1, 2020 as the Alberta government will not cover the **biologic** version after this date.

A letter will be provided to each low-income client that is impacted informing them of the change and advising them to discuss switching to a biosimilar with their healthcare professional.

Since the Alberta government will no longer provide coverage for specific biologic drugs, exception coverage will not be available through the Health Benefits Exception Committee (HBEC). However, if a prescriber determines there is a medical reason that prevents a client from switching, they can request exceptional coverage of the originator drug by submitting an Alberta Blue Cross Special Authorization request, clearly identifying why the patient is unable to switch.

For additional questions about the *Biosimilar Initiative*, please contact Alberta Blue Cross at 1-800-661-6995. More information can be found in the links below, including the Special Authorization Request Form.

General information about the Biosimilar initiative:

<https://www.alberta.ca/biosimilar-drugs.aspx><https://www.ab.bluecross.ca/government-plan/biosimilar-initiative.php>

Detailed client-focused information:

<https://www.ab.bluecross.ca/government-plan/biosimilar-initiative.php>

Detailed healthcare professional-focused:

<https://www.ab.bluecross.ca/providers/pharmacy-resources.php>

Biosimilar Initiative Exception Special Authorization Request Form

<https://idbl.ab.bluecross.ca/idbl/DBL/60076.pdf>