Biosimilars Canada
The Voice of Biosimilar Medicines in Canada

For Immediate Release

Northwest Territories Becomes Fifth Jurisdiction in Canada to Implement Biosimilar Switching Initiative

Toronto – December 21, 2021 – Biosimilars Canada, a national association representing Canada's biosimilar medicines industry, today welcomed the announcement by the Government of the Northwest Territories that it will implement a "switching" or transitioning policy to expand the use of biosimilar medicines under its public drug programs.

"Biosimilars Canada congratulates the Government of the Northwest Territories and Health Minister Green for being the first territorial government – and the fifth jurisdiction in Canada – to implement a biosimilar switching policy to improve the sustainability of its drug plans and support increased patient access to medicines," said Jim Keon, President of Biosimilars Canada.

With today's announcement the Northwest Territories becomes the fifth jurisdiction in Canada – and the first territorial government – to implement a biosimilar switching policy.

Patients covered by the Northwest Territories public drug plans who use one of 10 biologic drugs to treat such diseases as arthritis, diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease and psoriasis will switch to a biosimilar version of the medicine by June 20, 2022. This evidence-informed strategy will optimize public resources to ensure the best value for treatments, improve access to medications for patients and contribute to the sustainability of the public drug plans.

Switching from an originator biologic drug to a biosimilar is a safe and effective practice. Health Canada confirms that "patients and health care providers can have confidence that biosimilars are effective and safe for each of their authorized indications, and that no differences are expected in efficacy and safety following a change in routine use between a biosimilar and its reference biologic drug in an authorized indication."[1]

Biologic medicines have revolutionized the treatment of many disabling and life-threatening diseases but it can cost $10,000 to $25,000 or more to treat a patient with a biologic drug for a year, which is placing an enormous financial strain on drug budgets.

"Biosimilars Canada and its member companies look forward to working with the Government of the Northwest Territories to ensure the successful implementation of its biosimilars switching policy," said Keon. "It is time for all provincial and territorial governments to follow the lead of the Northwest Territories and four provinces in bringing the benefits of biosimilar switching programs to their patients, health care providers and taxpayers."

The full benefits of biosimilars cannot be realized unless drug plans adopt policies that support their expanded use with the implementation of successful biosimilar transitioning or "switching" policy. Under these policies – as have already been implemented in British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec and New Brunswick – patients who use a biologic drug to treat a chronic condition are transitioned or "switched" from an original biologic drug to a biosimilar biologic drug under the supervision of their treating physician.

[1] Health Canada, *Biosimilar biologic drugs in Canada: Fact Sheet*.

There is extensive real-world experience with biosimilars in Canada, with more than 761,000 retail prescriptions filled annually, according to IQVIA data. Biosimilars are also used extensively in the hospital and oncology markets. There have also been more than 178 clinical trials worldwide involving approximately 21,000 switched patients which confirm that switching from an originator biologic drug to a biosimilar biologic drug is not associated with any major efficacy, safety, or immunogenicity issues.[2]

Full details of the Northwest Territories Biosimilars Initiative are available at: https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/biosimilar-initiative

About Biosimilars Canada
Biosimilars Canada is a national association representing the biosimilar medicines industry in Canada. Our member companies are at the forefront of the global development and marketing of biosimilar medicines. Biosimilars Canada provides leadership in educating Canadian stakeholders about the safety and efficacy of biosimilar medicines, and advocates for policies that support their timely approval, reimbursement, market acceptance and expanded use. Biosimilars Canada is a division of the Canadian Generic Pharmaceutical Association. Visit us at www.biosimilarscanada.ca.

About Biosimilar Medicines[3]
A biosimilar biologic drug, or biosimilar, is a drug demonstrated to be highly similar to a biologic drug that was already authorized for sale. Health Canada evaluates all the information provided to confirm that the biosimilar and the reference biologic drug are similar and that there are no clinically meaningful differences in safety and efficacy between them. Health Canada's rigorous standards for authorization mean that you can have the same confidence in the quality, safety and efficacy of a biosimilar as any other biologic drug.

Contact:
Jeff Connell
Vice President, Corporate Affairs
Canadian Generic Pharmaceutical Association (CGPA)
Mobile: (647) 274-3379
Email: jeff@canadiangenerics.ca

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[2] Barbier, L. et. al. *The Efficacy, Safety, and Immunogenicity of Switching Between Reference Biopharmaceuticals and Biosimilars: A Systematic Review*, March 31, 2020.
[5] Health Canada, *Biosimilar biologic drugs in Canada: Fact Sheet*