

MEDICARE INELIGIBLE

F A C T S H E E T

HOW TO OBTAIN HIV TREATMENT AND MEDICAL CARE IN QUEENSLAND

In Australia, HIV and other prescription medicines are obtained through the Australian *Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)* – which provides subsidised (low cost) medicines to Australian Medicare card holders only.

A Medicare card is issued to Australian citizens, permanent residents (or those applying for permanent residency visas) and New Zealand citizens living in Australia. Subsidised PBS medicines are not available to people without Medicare cards. As a consequence, overseas visitors (working, studying or holidaying in Australia) who are not eligible for a Medicare card will need to consider other options for obtaining HIV treatment. This resource outlines those options, as well as how to access ongoing medical care and monitoring during your stay in Queensland.

GENERIC MEDICINES ACCESS

HIV generic (alternative manufacturer) medicines can be ordered online, and are an affordable alternative for people without Medicare cards who have no access through the Australian PBS for obtaining HIV brand (original manufacturer) medicines. Generic medicines are cheaper versions of high cost brand medicines, but still equally effective against HIV.

Whilst HIV generic medicines are more expensive than PBS subsidised HIV brand medicines, they are a high cost saving compared to the full purchase cost of HIV brand medicines. Generic medicines cost in the hundreds of dollars per item, rather than the thousands of dollars of full cost brand medicines. It is not recommended, unless you can afford it, to pay for the full cost of brand medicines purchased from your hospital or community pharmacy, as you will save a lot of money by purchasing your generic medicines online.

The following online supply companies are sources for HIV generic medicines that can be ordered and shipped to Australia. To order you must have a medical prescription slip, which can be obtained by consulting a local Australian HIV doctor (who can also monitor your HIV medical care as required – without the need for a Medicare card):

www.aids-drugs-online.com

www.alldaychemist.com

www.inhousepharmacy.vu

SHIPPING AND ORDERING GENERIC MEDICINES

Shipping times for delivery can vary. It is important to ask your chosen online ordering company about their shipping times, as well as shipping costs (if any).

Allow enough time to place your order, and to receive it, before your current supply runs out (if you are already taking HIV treatment) to ensure you don't miss any doses – as HIV treatment should be taken every day without skipping or missing doses. Once you have started treatment, count the number of doses you have left and compare that with how long your next order will take to get here to you.

To order generic medicines set up **your own personal login and account** with the online company you choose to order from, and include your address where the medicines will be sent. Follow their ordering system instructions and monitor any correspondence (emails or messages) received from them.

Also, it is important that you receive a **'tracking number'** when you place your order and make your purchase – this number allows you to follow the progress of the shipping package to the address you have provided. If you change your address you need to inform the online supplier immediately and change your account details. It is important to check your emails or messages in case the supplier tries to contact you to tell you of any shipping delays.



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The price of HIV medicines may vary from site to site, so it's a good idea to check more than one online generic medicine supply company's website, to compare costs. Also be aware that online supply ordering companies sell in US\$ dollars, so any changes in the exchange rate can slightly affect the cost of medications from day to day. You are best advised to order from reputable online ordering companies who also communicate well with you about your order.

Otherwise you may run the risk of losing your money from unreliable suppliers and be left without HIV medication for a period of time. The online ordering companies shown in this resource are the most commonly used.

CHECKING AND CLARIFYING YOUR ORDER

Before you place an order you should check with your HIV clinic (doctor or nurse) the correct generic medicine names (and amounts) that correspond with your prescription. This will help ensure medication ordering errors are not made when placing your order. In the search engine of the website you are ordering from you can type in the search engine the **brand name** of your medicine/s as listed on your prescription, and the **generic (alternative) name** will display, if that medicine is available.

When you place your order you will be required to scan and upload your prescription with your order. Your prescription provides an important guide to the supplier (showing the brand name medicine) which assists them to ensure against medication ordering errors, as well as acting as their authority to dispense the generic treatment/s to you.

! Do not order any medicines that are not written on your local prescription.

Staff at QPP can help with general guidance and discussion regarding how to set up an account and place an order, and assist in identifying which medicines you need to select.

However, you are advised to verify your specific generic medication orders with your HIV clinic who issued your prescription.

PERSONAL IMPORTATION OF YOUR MEDICINES – THE LEGAL SITUATION

In some circumstances you may be able to import HIV treatments from your home country whilst you are living in Australia. This may require your HIV doctor from your home country (if you have one) having communication with your HIV doctor in Australia.

Doing this may be more affordable than ordering generic medicines online.

You are legally allowed to import your own personal medications (brand name medicines from your home country or generic medicine import) – **three (3) month's supply at a time** – in accordance with the following guide by the Australian Department of Health (Therapeutic Goods Administration – TGA):

www.tga.gov.au/personal-importation-scheme

ACCESSING HIV MEDICAL CARE IN QUEENSLAND

All people living with HIV need to have regular appointments with their HIV doctor in order to monitor your HIV health through blood tests and obtain new prescriptions. Your HIV doctor will run relevant blood tests for you and issue your prescription for medicine (when required) at your appointments. The viral load test is the most important regular test to check if your treatments are working.

Although people who access subsidised PBS brand name medicines (at a small cost to the patient) are required to have an Australian Medicare card (or fall under the Reciprocal Healthcare Agreements - shown

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below), regular medical appointments can be made for people who do not have a Medicare card at either a Queensland public HIV/Sexual Health Service or at a private doctor.

When making your appointment, you are strongly advised to ask your chosen medical service if there will be any costs for attending the appointment or for blood tests without a Medicare card.

The following website provides contact and other relevant information about public HIV/Sexual Health services. You are required to attend the service that is closest to your place of residence in Queensland:

Visit the Queensland Health website at
<http://tinyurl.com/grhtx46>




Alternatively, you can choose to see a private HIV doctor. The choice is yours. You are not required to attend a public HIV/Sexual Health service.

Note: Private and Public HIV doctors are specially trained and authorised to write you a prescription for HIV treatments. General Practitioner (GP) doctors, without special training, cannot write a prescription for HIV medicine. If you are unsure where to find a HIV doctor (either public or private doctor) please call QPP.


Reciprocal Healthcare Agreements: The Australian Government has agreements with New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Italy, Belgium, Malta, Slovenia and Norway. A part of these agreements mean residents of these countries can get some essential medical treatments while visiting Australia.

Students from Norway, Finland, Malta and the Republic of Ireland aren't covered by agreements with those countries. With the exception of students from Belgium, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden it is a condition of your student visa that you take out *Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC)*.

As a resident of one of these countries, the United Kingdom, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Belgium, Norway, Slovenia, Malta and Italy, you are entitled to the following health or injury treatments while you are in Australia:

-  free treatment as a public in-patient or out-patient in a public hospital.
-  subsidised medicine under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).
-  Medicare benefits for out-of-hospital treatment provided by a doctor.

Residents of the Republic of Ireland and New Zealand are entitled to:

-  services as a public patient in a public hospital (including outpatient services) for medically necessary treatment medicines available on prescription which are subsidised under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), at the general rate.

To find out more visit the Department of Human Services website at
<http://tinyurl.com/lrm6gea>

ARE GENERIC MEDICINES SAFE AND RELIABLE?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) approves safe and reliable generic HIV medicines.

If your online supplier lists WHO approved generic medicines, then you are assured they are as effective to treat your HIV as brand (original manufacturer) medicines. Generic HIV medicines work as well as the brand name medicine because they contain the same active medicine and the same dose level.

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WHAT GENERIC MEDICINES ARE AVAILABLE?

Not all currently available HIV brand medicines are available in a generic medicine form.

This is because originating drug company manufacturers may have not granted patent licences to all parts of the developing world for generic medicines to be made (although many companies do grant such licences, and they also have medicines donation programs within less developed nations). Often however, generic medicines are not available for the latest/newest HIV medicines until the brand medicines' patent expires, or generic licences are obtained.

A patent grants a drug developer and original manufacturer an exclusive legal right to make that drug until the patent runs out, or a licence is granted (during the patent period) allowing a generic medicine company to make the drug in certain parts of the world as well.

Your HIV doctor will be aware of which generic medicines are available to be purchased online, and you are encouraged to familiarise yourself with them as well - by looking through the list of available HIV treatments on your chosen ordering company's website.

WHAT OTHER OPTIONS DO I HAVE TO GET HIV MEDICINE IN QUEENSLAND?

Many of the HIV drug companies who manufacture the brand name medicines are sometimes able to offer a portion of their available medicines through '**sponsorship programs**' for Medicare ineligible people (without Medicare cards). This would provide free HIV medicines, for an agreed period, through an individual arrangement between your HIV doctor and the HIV drug company.

Consideration is made on compassionate grounds if you are unable to access treatment in any other way. Before you consider ordering generic medicines online you should ask your HIV doctor whether you are able to gain a **drug sponsorship** for HIV medicines.

Your HIV doctor will then investigate this possibility for you. You should NOT feel shy or hesitant about asking your doctor about a drug sponsorship.

Additionally, you may ask your doctor whether there may be a **clinical trial** available which you may be eligible to participate in. This would allow you access to free medical care and treatment for the duration of the trial. Clinical trials study new HIV treatments or new ways of using older treatments.

For further information and assistance please contact:
Queensland Positive People (QPP)

Toll Free (within Queensland): 1800 636 241

Phone: 07 3013 5555

Email: info@qpp.org.au

Website: www.qpp.org.au

The information contained in this guide is current at publication date [2016] and may be subject to change. This information is intended as a guide only.