

**New treatment for ‘Australia’s national cancer’ -
melanoma - set to be reimbursed**

(AUSTRALIA, Melbourne, SUNDAY, JANUARY 21, 2024) - Australians aged 12 years and over diagnosed with an advanced stage of melanoma - ‘Australia’s national cancer’ - will gain affordable access to a new treatment on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) from Thursday, February 1, 2024.¹

OPDUALAG™ (nivolumab/relatlimab) - a combination of immunotherapies - is set to be reimbursed, and available for people diagnosed with melanoma that has spread (metastatic) or cannot be removed by surgery (unresectable).¹⁻³ Immunotherapies are treatments that aim to help the patient’s own immune system to fight cancer.⁴

Australia has one of the world’s highest rates of melanoma,² with more than 17,700 Australians estimated to have been diagnosed with the potentially devastating disease in 2022 alone.⁵ The disease represents the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australia, and the most commonly diagnosed cancer in young Australians aged between 20-39 years.⁶ While the majority of melanomas can be treated successfully with surgery if diagnosed early, estimates reveal in 2022, melanoma was associated with 1,281 deaths in Australia.⁵

According to Co-Medical Director of Melanoma Institute Australia, and 2024 NSW Australian of the Year, Professor Georgina Long AO, Sydney, more treatment options are required to support Australians living with advanced melanoma.

“Australians are more likely to develop melanoma of the skin because of the high levels of UV radiation due to our sunny climate. As a nation we also love our sports and the great outdoors,” said Prof Long.

“While prevention is paramount in reducing the incidence of melanoma, those who develop advanced or metastatic melanoma should have access to all treatments that have demonstrated benefit in robust clinical trials.

“Since the approval of the first drug to inhibit an immune checkpoint more than 10 years ago, we’ve seen immunotherapy changing the approach to treatment of patients living with advanced melanoma. However more needs to be done to improve upon this, and this is our focus,” Prof Long said.

When, James, 36, a civil project manager from Orange, NSW was diagnosed with advanced melanoma in February 2022, he was “caught off guard”, given his age, persistence with sun protection, and no known family history of the disease at the time.

“I never suspected I would be diagnosed with advanced melanoma. I was only 35 years of age and thought I was bulletproof up until then.

“I put on a brave face and managed to get through it all without it affecting my career and my employees. But it had a big effect on my family life,” said James.

Given James’ first-hand experience of living with advanced melanoma, he welcomes today’s PBS listing of another treatment option for the disease.

“The availability of another treatment broadens the range of treatments available, and improves patient access to treatment.”

Founder and CEO of the Melanoma & Skin Cancer Advocacy Network ([MSCAN](#)), Tamara Dawson, Melbourne, similarly welcomed the reimbursement of OPDUALAG for Australians aged 12 years and over living with unresectable or metastatic melanoma.

“While great progress has been made in the treatment of advanced melanoma, we need more ‘tools in the toolbox’.

“The reimbursement of this new combination immunotherapy provides an additional treatment option for people living with advanced melanoma, allowing them improved access to medicine when they need it most,” Ms Dawson said.

General Manager for Bristol Myers Squibb Australia and New Zealand, Mr Owen Smith, Melbourne, said today’s listing represents an important milestone for the Australian melanoma patient and clinician community, and the company.

“As the treatment landscape continues to change for Australians living with melanoma, we are proud of the role Bristol Myers Squibb has played and continues to play in delivering access to new treatments,” said Mr Smith.

About metastatic and unresectable melanoma

Metastatic melanoma occurs when pigment-producing skin cells grow uncontrollably, forming a tumour that spreads beyond the skin to other organs.⁸⁻⁹ For some people living with metastatic melanoma, their cancer cannot be surgically removed, meaning they have unresectable melanoma.¹⁰

About OPDUALAG

OPDUALAG is a combination of two immunotherapies, nivolumab and relatlimab, indicated for the treatment of patients with unresectable or metastatic melanoma who are at least 12 years old.³ OPDUALAG acts on the immune system and may cause inflammation.³ Inflammation may cause serious damage to a patient’s body and some inflammatory conditions may be life-threatening.³ The most frequent adverse events reported for OPDUALAG during clinical trials included musculoskeletal (muscles, joints and bone) pain, fatigue (feeling tired or weak), skin rash and itching, diarrhoea (watery, loose or soft stools), nausea, headache, underactive thyroid gland function, decreased appetite, cough and laboratory blood test abnormalities.³ Other, less common, but significant adverse reactions included vitiligo (white patches of discoloration of the skin), underactive adrenal glands, myocarditis (inflammation of the heart), and hepatitis (inflammation of the liver).³

For more information, please refer to the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) [here](#).

Disclosure

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Bristol Myers Squibb: Creating a Better Future for People with Cancer

Bristol Myers Squibb is inspired by a single vision – transforming patients’ lives through science.

The goal of the company’s cancer research is to deliver medicines that offer each patient a better, healthier life, and to make cure a possibility.

Building on a legacy across a broad range of cancers that have changed survival expectations for many, Bristol Myers Squibb researchers are exploring new frontiers in personalised medicine and, through innovative digital platforms, are turning data into insights that sharpen their focus. Deep understanding of causal human biology, cutting-edge capabilities, and differentiated research platforms uniquely position the company to approach cancer from every angle.

Cancer can have a relentless grasp on many parts of a patient's life, and Bristol Myers Squibb is committed to taking actions to address all aspects of care, from diagnosis to survivorship. As a leader in cancer care, Bristol Myers Squibb is working to empower all people with cancer to have a better future.

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. ™ Trademark. Prepared: January 2024. 1425-AU-2400002.

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Audio News Grabs: www.advancedmelanomamediakit.com.au/anr

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