**Private Benefit Provider Communication on**

**Biosimilar Transition Policy**

**Objective:** Enable private benefit providers to implement biosimilar transition policies by adding clarity and instilling confidence among plan sponsors and members that transitioning to a biosimilar is simple and effective.

**Purpose:** Provide resources to develop communications to plan sponsors and members on the details and rationale of a biosimilar transition policy.

Available resources include:

* A simple, step by step overview of the plan member journey during a transition policy
* Canadian biosimilar transition policy experience to date, including policy design, and results
* Demonstration of the financial value of biosimilars for plan sponsors

Dear Plan Sponsor,

We will be implementing drug coverage changes to increase the use of biosimilars by your plan members. This evidence-informed strategy will help provide significant savings to plan sponsors while providing the same effective treatment to plan members.

Over the last few years, multiple Canadian public and private drug plans have implemented policies which involve patients transitioning from a reference biologic drug to their biosimilar versions, providing valuable experience, key learnings, and positive results.

Please note that as of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, plan members using the following reference biologic drug will be required to have transitioned to their biosimilar versions:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Reference Biologic Brand Name**  **(Transition from)** | **Biosimilar Brand Name**  **(Transition To)** | **Health Conditions** |
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**What are biologics and biosimilars?**

Biologic drugs are created from living cells through a complex manufacturing process and used to treat diseases such as arthritis, diabetes, and inflammatory bowel disease. The first version of a biologic drug created is known as the “originator” or “Reference Biologic Drug”. Once the patent on the reference biologic drug expires, other manufacturers are allowed to make their own versions of those drugs, called biosimilars.

Health Canada must approve each biosimilar drug before they can be used by Canadian patients. Their rigorous standards for approval ensure there are no clinically meaningful differences in terms of safety and efficacy versus the reference biologic drug and that patients and healthcare providers can have the same confidence in biosimilars as any other biologic drug[[1]](#endnote-2).

For more information, please see the list of biosimilars resources available:

* [Health Canada Biosimilars Fact Sheet](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/biologics-radiopharmaceuticals-genetic-therapies/applications-submissions/guidance-documents/fact-sheet-biosimilars.html) i
* [Canadian Biosimilars Forum](https://www.canadianbiosimilarsforum.ca/aboutbiosimilars)[[2]](#endnote-3)
* [Canadian Digestive Health Foundation (CDHF): Biosimilar Library](https://cdhf.ca/digestive-disorders/crohns-disease/biosimilar-library/)[[3]](#endnote-4)
* [Arthritis Society](https://arthritis.ca/treatment/medication/biologics-and-biosimilars/biosimilars/what-are-biosimilars)[[4]](#endnote-5)
* [Arthritis Consumer Experts (ACE): Biosim Exchange](https://biosim.jointhealth.org/)[[5]](#endnote-6)

**The Canadian experience:**

Biosimilars are not new in Canada. Health Canada has approved over 35 biosimilars since 2014[[6]](#endnote-7). Biosimilars have been reimbursed by private insurance providers in Canada since 2015.

Despite being up to 50% less expensive than reference biologic drugs, the uptake of biosimilars used to treat chronic diseases in Canada has remained low[[7]](#endnote-8).

To fully benefit from the potential of biosimilars, public drug plans in British Columbia, Alberta, New Brunswick, and Quebec have implemented or announced biosimilar transition policies for existing patients.

Multiple private insurance providers have also implemented biosimilar transition policies, primarily to benefit from coordinating coverage with public drug plan transition policies. Results from these Canadian policies demonstrate a high rate of transitioning to a biosimilar while maintaining patient outcomes, no increase in healthcare resource utilization and significant cost savings.

* [British Columbia Biosimilars Initiative Data](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/practitioner-professional-resources/pharmacare/prescribers/biosimilars-initiative-prescribers)[[8]](#endnote-9)
* [British Columbia Biosimilars Initiative health services utilization](https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/doi/epdf/10.1002/pds.5008)[[9]](#endnote-10)
* [Albert Biosimilars Initiative Data](https://www.centerforbiosimilars.com/view/alberta-sees-early-success-from-switching-patients-to-biosimilars)[[10]](#endnote-11)
* [Pacific Blue Cross Biosimilar Transition Policy](https://virtualsymposium.cadth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Poster_1895.pdf)[[11]](#endnote-12)
* [Green Shield Biosimilar Transition Policy](https://www.benefitscanada.com/benefits/health-benefits/webinar-coverage-switching-to-biosimilars-can-generate-savings-say-early-adopters/)[[12]](#endnote-13)

**Financial considerations:**

Biosimilars are essential to drug plan sustainability as they are safe, effective options that have the potential to provide significant savings to plan sponsors and members. It is estimated that biosimilars could save Canadian public and private drug plans up to $1.8 billion per year[[13]](#endnote-14), a number that will increase in the future as more biosimilars are approved in Canada. These savings can help ensure plan members have timely access to new, innovative medicines or to improve other areas of plan member health care. It will become increasingly important that private plans coordinate coverage policies with public drug plans to manage their proportion of plan member costs for biologics when biosimilars options are available.

* [Green Shield Biosimilar Transition policy saved $8,500 per plan member annually](https://www.benefitscanada.com/benefits/health-benefits/webinar-coverage-switching-to-biosimilars-can-generate-savings-say-early-adopters/)xii
* [Pacific Blue Cross saved $22 Million for plan sponsors and members with their biosimilar transition policy](https://virtualsymposium.cadth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Poster_1895.pdf)xi
* [Equitable Life: Risk of Not Coordinating with Alberta Public Transition Policy[[14]](#endnote-15)](https://advisor.equitable.ca/advisor/en/news/responding-to-alberta-s-biosimilar-initiative)

**Plan Member Journey: What does this mean for your plan members?**

Plan members will receive a communication from their private insurance provider which will inform them of the biosimilar transition policy. They will be instructed to make an appointment with their physician to discuss their options. Based on previous Canadian biosimilar transition policy results, the vast majority of patients will transition to a biosimilar and be immediately enrolled into the biosimilar patient support program. However, in exceptional cases, physicians may submit an Exemption Request for a patient to remain on the reference biologic drug based on the medical justification provided by the physician.

However, it is important to remember that during the transition to a biosimilar the patient’s primary healthcare team, their physician and nurse, will not change.

Canadian patient groups have created multiple resources to help patients and physicians discuss transitioning to a biosimilar

* [Patient Journey when Transitioning to a biosimilar: an animation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_LOUkaFflL4)
* [ACE Biosimilars Transition Infographic](https://jointhealth.org/pdfs/BiosimilarsinCanada_Infographic_APRIL2021_En.pdf)[[15]](#endnote-16)
* [ACE Biosimilars Education Video: Transitioning to a Biosimilar](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRgwW2WftIA)[[16]](#endnote-17)
* [ACE Biosimilars Education Video: Helping Patients Manage the Transition](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wr32YOtKPMs)[[17]](#endnote-18)
* [CDHF: Transition Pathway Brochure for IBD Patients](https://cdhf.ca/digestive-disorders/crohns-disease/biosimilar-library/#1)[[18]](#endnote-19)
* [CDHF Video: Transitioning to a Biosimilar](https://cdhf.ca/digestive-disorders/crohns-disease/biosimilar-library/#2)[[19]](#endnote-20)

References:

1. [Biosimilar biologic drugs in Canada: Health Canada Fact Sheet](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/biologics-radiopharmaceuticals-genetic-therapies/applications-submissions/guidance-documents/fact-sheet-biosimilars.html) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. [Canadian Biosimilars Forum](https://www.canadianbiosimilarsforum.ca/aboutbiosimilars) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. [Canadian Digestive Health Foundation Biosimilar Library](https://cdhf.ca/digestive-disorders/crohns-disease/biosimilar-library/) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. [What are biosimilars? | Arthritis Society](https://arthritis.ca/treatment/medication/biologics-and-biosimilars/biosimilars/what-are-biosimilars) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. [Biosim Exchange | ACE](https://biosim.jointhealth.org/) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. [Update on biosimilars in Canada - April 2021](https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/update-on-biosimilars-in-canada-april-7703939/) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. [PMPRB 2020 biologics-part1-market-trends.pdf](file:///C:\Users\weicks\OneDrive%20-%20Pfizer\Biosimilars\Policy\Sustainability\PMPRB%202020%20biologics-part1-market-trends.pdf) [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. [Biosimilars Initiative Province of British Columbia](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/practitioner-professional-resources/pharmacare/prescribers/biosimilars-initiative-prescribers) [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. [Rapid monitoring of health services utilization following a shift in coverage from brand name to biosimilar drugs in British Columbia](https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/doi/epdf/10.1002/pds.5008) [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. [Alberta, Canada, Sees Early Success From Switching Patients to Biosimilars](https://www.centerforbiosimilars.com/view/alberta-sees-early-success-from-switching-patients-to-biosimilars) [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. [Private Payor Journey to Biosimilar Switching](https://pfizer-my.sharepoint.com/personal/weicks_pfizer_com/Documents/Biosimilars/Private%20Payers/CPBI%20Events%202021/2%20Pager%20Document%20June%202021/Biosimilar%20transitioning:%20a%20Private%20Payor's%20Journey) [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. [Switching to biosimilars can generate savings](https://www.benefitscanada.com/benefits/health-benefits/webinar-coverage-switching-to-biosimilars-can-generate-savings-say-early-adopters/) [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. [PMPRB Report on Biosimilar Savings in Canada](http://www.pmprb-cepmb.gc.ca/CMFiles/NPDUIS/Potential_Savings_from_Biosimilars_in_Canada_Biosimilar_Workshop_e.pdf) [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. [Responding to Alberta's Biosimilar Initiative | Equitable Life's](https://advisor.equitable.ca/advisor/en/news/responding-to-alberta-s-biosimilar-initiative)  [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. [BiosimilarsinCanada\_Infographic\_APRIL2021\_En.pdf (jointhealth.org)](https://jointhealth.org/pdfs/BiosimilarsinCanada_Infographic_APRIL2021_En.pdf) [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. [Transitioning to a biosimilar ACE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRgwW2WftIA) [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. [Helping patients manage the transition to a biosimilar](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wr32YOtKPMs) [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. [Transition Pathway Brochure for Patients](https://3xlbea253907ff1y7v6f5yyv-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CDHF-EnglishBiosimilarTransitionPathwayBrochure.pdf) [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. [Switching from a Biologic to a Biosimilar](https://cdhf.ca/digestive-disorders/crohns-disease/ibd-switching-from-a-biologic-to-a-biosimilar/) [↑](#endnote-ref-20)