

Plain English Summary

Treatments for advanced prostate cancer

What does the guidance say?

Degarelix, enzalutamide and olaparib are recommended for listing on the Medication Assistance Fund (MAF) for government funding for patients with advanced prostate cancer who meet certain criteria.

Subsidy will be available for degarelix from 4 January 2022, and from 1 September 2022 for enzalutamide and olaparib.

Apalutamide, cabazitaxel and darolutamide are not recommended for subsidy for prostate cancer.

What is advanced prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer occurs when abnormal cells in the prostate gland grow uncontrollably and form a mass (tumour). When cancer cells spread from the prostate to other parts of the body, most commonly to the bones and lymph nodes, this is known as advanced or metastatic disease.

Prostate cancer cells need male sex hormones (androgens) like testosterone to grow. Hormone therapy, also known as androgen deprivation therapy (ADT) is used to lower testosterone levels and slow the growth of cancer cells. Doctors classify prostate cancer according to the type of treatment that is likely to work:

- Hormone-sensitive or hormone-dependent prostate cancer means that it needs hormones (androgens) in order to grow and can be treated with ADT.
- Castrate-resistant prostate cancer means that the cancer cells keep growing even when the amount of testosterone is reduced to very low levels with treatment.

What are degarelix, enzalutamide and olaparib?

Degarelix is a hormone therapy called a GnRH antagonist that stops the production of testosterone. It is given as an injection under the skin (subcutaneously).

Enzalutamide belongs to a group of medicines called second-generation anti-androgens which stops testosterone from reaching cancer cells. It is taken orally.

Olaparib belongs to a group of medicines called PARP inhibitors. It is used for patients with prostate cancer who have a specific genetic mutation and who have already tried second-generation anti-androgens, but the cancer continues to worsen. It is taken orally.

Your doctor will tell you which treatment is most suitable for you, how much you need to take and how long you need to take it for.

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Who can have degarelix, enzalutamide or olaparib?

Patients with advanced hormone-dependent prostate cancer can have degarelix.

Enzalutamide is used in combination with androgen deprivation therapy (ADT) for treating:

- High-risk non-metastatic castration-resistant prostate cancer;
- Metastatic hormone-sensitive prostate cancer; and
- Metastatic castration-resistant prostate cancer.

Olaparib is used for treating patients with metastatic castration-resistant prostate cancer if:

- They have a BRCA 1/2 or ATM genetic mutation confirmed by a diagnostic test; and
- Their cancer has continued to worsen despite prior treatment with a second-generation anti-androgen therapy (like abiraterone, enzalutamide, apalutamide or darolutamide).

ADT should be continued during treatment with olaparib.

Your doctor can advise if any of these treatments are suitable for you.

Why were these treatments recommended for funding?

ACE evaluates how well a treatment works in relation to how much it costs compared to other treatments. Degarelix, enzalutamide and olaparib were recommended for funding because their benefit in improving survival for certain patients with advanced prostate cancer justifies their costs.

Apalutamide, cabazitaxel and darolutamide were not recommended for subsidy because their benefits do not justify their costs. If you need one of these treatments for prostate cancer, you can speak to a medical social worker to find out if there is other financial assistance available to help with the cost of treatment.

The MAF helps people pay for expensive treatments that are clinically necessary. If your doctor prescribes degarelix, enzalutamide or olaparib for you, and you meet the MAF criteria, your treatment cost will be subsidised by 40% to 75%.

All three drugs have also been included on the Cancer Drug List (CDL) and are claimable under MediShield Life. The subsidy class and MediShield Life claim limits are available at go.gov.sg/moh-cancer-drug-list.

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Updated: 19 December 2022

First published: 4 January 2022

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