

## **When you are living with cancer, quick and optimal access to medication can be a matter of life or death**

*Timely access to innovative medicines benefits all Canadians and should be a top government priority*

**By Denis Hello, Vice-President and General Manager, AbbVie Canada**

Despite innovative, clinically proven therapies being approved by Health Canada, there are still many Canadians with cancer who are experiencing delays and medication access challenges. Today, it is estimated that over 600 Canadians will learn they have cancer.<sup>i</sup> As the leading cause of death in Canada, cancer is responsible for 30 per cent of all deaths in our country.<sup>ii</sup> While alarming, there is hope. Between 1992 to 1994 and 2012 to 2014, cancer survival rates in Canada increased from 55 per cent to 63 per cent at the five years after diagnosis mark.<sup>iii</sup> A report released by the Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) shows the biggest increases in cancer survival since the early 1990s have been for blood cancers. In 2019, an estimated 21,000 Canadians were diagnosed with blood cancers, representing about 10 per cent of all cancer diagnoses.<sup>iv</sup>

While there are a variety of factors including the Canadian Governments' efforts that are contributing to improved cancer care in Canada and advancements in cancer treatment, Canadians still experience delays in accessing clinically proven, innovative medications. Once the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH) commences its drug review process, it can take up to **2 years for a medication to be made available to Canadians.**<sup>v</sup> Some Canadians are granted quicker access to their medication through their private insurer, while others may have to wait longer for public funding. Many countries have tackled this barrier, by simplifying access to innovative medicines providing sustainable solutions. For example, in Germany, once a pharmaceutical product has been authorized, it is immediately eligible for reimbursement from the Government Health Insurance (GKV) fund.<sup>vi</sup> We must focus on individuals living with cancer who must wait multiple years to access public coverage of Health Canada approved therapies.

**For cancer patients like Mark Silverstein, medication choice and timely access are essential.**

Most blood-related cancers are considered incurable and become harder to treat each time they return. *Relapse* – meaning the cancer reappears after a period of remission - and *refractory* – used to describe when cancer no longer responds to a specific treatment – become a new reality that Canadians managing blood cancer get accustomed to. In this context, it is important to delay disease progressions and improve quality of life so that Canadians can live longer. “The first thing I understood during my initial consultation with my hematologist about my leukemia is that it was chronic. Since my diagnosis in 2010, I have relapsed three times, but I am one of the lucky ones since the right treatment was available to me at the right time,” says Silverstein who resides in Aurora, ON. “As a Canadian living with CLL, having medication choice and access is essential. I have chosen my own way over the last eight years - by educating myself on my disease, maintaining a healthy partnership with my hematologist, by removing fear from my choices, and finally to consistently remain intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually open to a journey with no assurances on how it will all turn out.”

**Better together – Canadians with cancer deserve enhanced access to innovative treatments.**

With a strong commitment to developing innovative therapies for patients and contributing to longer-term healthcare sustainability, AbbVie is committed to developing and providing solutions that transform the current treatment paradigm and bring significant clinical value to patients, healthcare practitioners and our healthcare system.

For cancer patients, timely access to the right medication can mean the difference between life and death. Collaboration between government, industry and our healthcare system will surely result in more optimal cancer care and our policymakers can play a greater role in ensuring the timeliness of that access to care.



Denis Hello is Vice-President and General Manager of AbbVie Canada. AbbVie’s mission is to discover and deliver innovative medicines that solve serious health issues today and address the medical challenges of tomorrow.

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<sup>i</sup> Cancer Statistics at a Glance. Canadian Cancer Society. <https://www.cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-101/cancer-statistics-at-a-glance/?region=on>

<sup>ii</sup> IBID

<sup>iii</sup> IBID

<sup>iv</sup> New report shows survival for blood cancers has increased more than any other cancer over 20 years. Canadian Cancer Society. <https://www.cancer.ca/en/about-us/for-media/media-releases/national/2019/canadian-cancer-statistics/?region=nl>

<sup>v</sup> Innovative Medicines Canada. <http://innovativemedicines.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/CADTH-Poster-EN.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Reimbursement of Pharmaceuticals in Germany 2018.

[https://www.iges.com/e15094/e15095/e15096/e17469/IGES\\_Reimbursement\\_Pharmaceuticals\\_2018\\_WEB\\_ger.pdf](https://www.iges.com/e15094/e15095/e15096/e17469/IGES_Reimbursement_Pharmaceuticals_2018_WEB_ger.pdf)