



osteoporosis australia

Consumer media release

Monday, December 18, 2006
For immediate use

Osteoporosis Australia welcomes Government's landmark decision to provide subsidised testing and treatment for fracture prevention

Osteoporosis Australia has welcomed the Government's announcement today to provide Australians aged 70 years and above with access to subsidised bone density tests and medication for the prevention of fractures.

According to Judy Stenmark, CEO of Osteoporosis Australia: "The government has today placed something special in the Christmas bone stocking of many older Australians.

"Thousands of Australians aged 70 years and above are set to benefit from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) listing of two osteoporosis medications and Medicare's reimbursement of bone mineral density (BMD) tests for people aged 70 years and above," said Judy.

"This decision is a significant step towards prevention, rather than simply providing treatment for people who have sustained fractures due to this crippling bone disease."

Up until now, a Medicare rebate for BMD testing and PBS treatment for osteoporosis was only available to people who had already sustained a fracture. Those whose GPs had recommended medication for treating low bone density who had not yet sustained a fracture, were previously required to pay the full price for their tests and treatment.

Prof. Peter Ebeling, Medical Director of Osteoporosis Australia, said: "From 1 April, 2007, people aged 70 years and above with a bone density of minus 3.0 (very low bone density) will be able to receive medication for osteoporosis on the PBS. This is a landmark decision for older people living with osteoporosis."

Osteoporosis is a disease where bones become brittle and fracture easily. When a fracture occurs, the condition is usually considered to be quite advanced. Treating people with low bone density before a fracture occurs is a preventative measure and aims to reduce the incidence and burden of osteoporotic fractures in Australia.

"This is a very important step forward in assisting Australian men and women at high risk of osteoporotic fractures," Judy said. "Research tells us that once a person has sustained their first osteoporotic fracture, they are five times more likely to re-fracture (known as the "fracture cascade"). So preventing that first fracture is very important".

Prof. Philip Sambrook, member of the OA Medical and Scientific Committee and OA Board, said: "OA has been lobbying hard over the past five years for subsidised testing and treatment. This is an important decision for improving the quality of life of older Australians."

Osteoporosis is a major public health problem affecting approximately two million Australians at any given time. Loss of bone occurs progressively over many years without the presence of symptoms and often a fracture is the first sign of osteoporosis. For this reason, osteoporosis is often referred to as the "silent epidemic"¹.

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For more information or to organise an interview with Professor Peter Ebeling, Judy Stenmark or Professor Philip Sambrook, please contact Kirsten Bruce at viva! communications on m. 0401 717 566.

Reference

1. *Invest in your bones. Bone Appétit. The role of food and nutrition in building and maintaining strong bones – August 2006.* Written on behalf of the IOF Committee of Scientific Advisors by Bess Dawson-Hughes, MD, Professor of Medicine, Director of the bone Metabolism Laboratory, Jean Mayer USDA Human nutrition Research Center on Aging, and Director of the Metabolic Bone Diseases Clinic, Tufts-New England Medical Center, Tufts University, Boston, MA, USA.