

# The benefits of biosimilars



If you, or someone you know, has used a biologic drug, you know the benefits they can provide. Biologics are important therapies in treating conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease, anemia, cancer and skin conditions.

Biologics represent the fastest growing segment of the pharmaceutical market, and one of the most costly, due to their unique, complex production and handling requirements. While most well-known drugs (such as aspirin) are created with small-molecule chemicals, biologics are specialized drugs in a category of their own, as they are made of large complex molecules derived from a living organism (such as bacteria or yeast) and then manufactured through advanced biotechnology.

Over the last decade, biologics have become increasingly prescribed to treat a wide range of conditions. Today, there are over 200 biologics and vaccines on the market worldwide and more than 900 in the development pipeline.

## What are Biosimilars?

Biosimilars, previously known as subsequent entry biologics, are lower cost versions of biologics. Once an originator biologic is no longer under patent protection, biosimilars can enter the market. The research and development of biosimilars continues to grow; today there are over 90 studies with over 14,000 patients involving switching from originator biologics to biosimilars.<sup>1</sup>

A number of biosimilars have already been approved by Health Canada and are being used to treat a variety of conditions. Biosimilars are considered to be equally as safe and effective as their biologic origins, but at a more affordable cost.

Here are some biosimilar facts:

1. Biosimilars must show clinical evidence that they are similar in effectiveness and safety to the originator brand before they are approved in Canada. Health Canada's rigorous standards for authorization mean that "patients and health care providers can have the same confidence in the quality, safety and efficacy of a biosimilar as any other biologic drug."<sup>2</sup>
2. Numerous studies and real-world experience have shown that a patient's transition from the originator biologic to the biosimilar is well-tolerated and safe.
3. They are less expensive than the originator biologic brands.
4. They have full patient support programs just like the originator biologic brand.

Pacific Blue Cross is strongly committed to supporting the biosimilar market. Through the support of biosimilars where appropriate, we can provide Members with access to the best available care, while keeping the sustainability of our plans in mind and directing cost savings to other necessary treatments and medications.

<sup>1</sup>Cohen, H., Blauvelt, A., Rifkin, R., Danese, S., Gokhale, S., Woollett, G. Switching Reference Medicines to Biosimilars: A Systematic Literature Review of Clinical Outcomes. 2018; 78(4): 463–478. Published online 2018 Mar 3. doi: 10.1007/s40265-018-0881-y  
<sup>2</sup>Health Canada. (2017-08-03). Fact Sheet: Biosimilars. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/biologics-radiopharmaceuticals-genetic-therapies/applications-submissions/guidance-documents/fact-sheet-biosimilars.html>