

Global Biosimilars Week ^[1]

Our world can benefit from greater access to biosimilars and it starts with better awareness

Join the first #GlobalBiosimilarsWeek!

There has been many developments over the past twelve months in policy environment in Canada, as two provinces (British Columbia and Alberta) have made major reimbursement policy changes to increase the use of biosimilar products. Thanks to growing evidence, biosimilars have already demonstrated improved access and patient care.

On the other hand, the Ontario Drug Policy Research Network (ODPRN) recently released the results of their study¹ on the utilization of biologics and the potential cost savings from mandatory non-medical switching policies. It demonstrates that between June 1, 2015 and December 31, 2019, over 6.2 million units of infliximab, etanercept, and adalimumab were reimbursed by provincial public drug programs in Canada. Of these, only 4% (240,737 units) were biosimilar formulations.

This analysis demonstrates very low levels of biosimilar utilization, despite preferential listing status for biosimilars in patients new to biologic therapy. Biosimilars deserve to be more widely accessible across Canada and it is clear that other approaches must be considered to shift utilization patterns and realize the important benefits of biosimilars for the health of Canadian patients and the sake of our healthcare system.

Biosimilars also deserve to be better known. I believe that any initiative that can help patients, doctors and Canadians better understand biosimilars and learn more about their proven safety and efficacy as approved by Health Canada, as well as their benefits for our healthcare system, is extremely useful. I commend the International Generic and Biosimilar Medicines Association (IGBA) and its members for launching the **first Global Biosimilars Week** this year. In the same vein as the Biosimilars Generation campaign and dedicated website (www.BiosimilarsGeneration.ca ^[2]) that Sandoz Canada launched last June, this new global initiative will help facilitate discussion of biosimilars and inform a generation of people worldwide who are interested in helping sustain our healthcare system.

The Global Biosimilars Week, held from November 16 to 20, seeks to educate patients, medical professionals, insurance providers and policymakers about biosimilars. Its various global and local initiatives will provide fact-based information and education about biosimilars, including patient testimonies, regulatory updates from around the world and evidence of how biosimilar medicines can continue to positively impact the lives of patients moving forward. The campaign website globalbiosimilarsweek.org represents an additional tool to which healthcare professionals, especially prescribing physicians, can direct their patients in order to have informed conversations with them about biosimilars.

Expanded use of biosimilars could benefit not only patients and their healthcare providers, but also policymakers and every one of us. Biologic medicines have transformed the treatment of many complex diseases. However, the cost of these medicines is also putting financial strain on our healthcare system. Increasing patient access to biosimilar medicines can safely and responsibly help alleviate this budget crunch by bringing economies and value to patients and to countries. Part of these savings could also be reinvested in novel therapies.

In the case of Canada, the ODPRN study¹ found that mandatory non-medical switching policies² introduced in all provinces in 2019 (etanercept and infliximab only) could generate \$239.6 million in national savings.

British Columbia and Alberta drug programs are already monitoring the impacts of their switching policies, which should alleviate stakeholder concerns and demonstrate the contribution of biosimilars to healthcare system financial sustainability. As the current pandemic continues to impose financial challenges on our health care systems, provincial governments in collaboration with all stakeholders should promptly take action to improve access to biosimilars, including by adopting well-controlled switch policies.

As a global leader and a pioneer in biosimilars research, development, manufacturing and commercialization, Sandoz is committed to greater patient access to biosimilar medicines and educating the new Biosimilars Generation. As the Head of Biosimilars at Sandoz, I proudly support the Global Biosimilars Week and hope it will contribute to opening people's eyes about biosimilars.

1. ODPRN ? Crosby, M., Tadrous, M., & Gomes, T. (2020). Potential Cost Implications of Mandatory Non-Medical Switching Policies for Biologics for Rheumatic Conditions and Inflammatory Bowel Disease in Canada. *Clinical Pharmacology & Therapeutics*.
 2. Switching policies are policies that change coverage for specific biologic medicines. Under a switching policy, patients and their prescribers have a certain period to discuss switching from an originator brand to a biosimilar brand.
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Links

[1] <https://www.sandoz.ca/en/global-biosimilars-week>

[2] <http://www.biosimilarsgeneration.ca/>