

12 month prescriptions

Guidance

December 2025



Background..... 3

For prescribers 3

For pharmacists 4

What is not changing..... 6

Patient messaging and awareness 7

Background

From 1 February 2026, the Government will increase the maximum period of supply for most prescription types from three months to up to 12 months for people with stable, long-term health conditions with the aim of improving health outcomes.

This change aims to improve access to medicines by reducing the need for frequent prescriber visits for new prescriptions for regular medicines. It is also expected to free up time for prescribers to focus on patients who need more complex care.

The maximum quantity of medicine to be supplied on each prescription will still be determined by the prescriber.

For prescribers

Regulation changes and impacts for prescribers

- The **Medicines Regulations** have been amended to allow prescribers to issue prescriptions for a quantity of medicine for a period of supply of up to 12 months (a 12 month prescription), if clinically appropriate and safe.
- You can find the new regulations **here**.
- A 12 month prescription will not be clinically appropriate for all people. A quantity of medicine sufficient for 12 months is the maximum, not a requirement.
- The first dispensing of the prescription must occur within three months of the prescription being issued.
- Repeats on all prescriptions, including those for quantities less than 12 months, may be dispensed up until 12 months after the prescription was issued. For example, if a prescription is written on 1 February 2026, repeats may be dispensed until 31 January 2027.

- If a prescriber does not want any further repeat supplies to be dispensed beyond a certain date or period, they should ensure this is clearly indicated on the prescription
- No repeats may legally be dispensed more than 12 months after the prescription was issued, meaning a delay between the prescription being issued/written and the first dispensing may result in a reduction in the total quantity of medicine that can be supplied.
- Prescribers should be prepared for requests for 12 month prescriptions from patients and use their clinical discretion to determine what is best for each person.

Special Authority funding impacts for prescribers

- Prescribers should ensure for any medicines with Special Authority requirements, that the Special Authority approval is valid for the entire length of the prescription, particularly for prescriptions longer than three months. Special Authority renewals can be applied for up to six months before the expiry date.
- Prescribers should be prepared for Special Authority renewal requests from patients and pharmacists if the Special Authority is not valid for the whole prescription.

For pharmacists

Regulation changes and impacts for pharmacists

- The **Medicines Regulations** have been amended to allow prescribers to issue prescriptions for a quantity of medicine for a period of supply of up to 12 months (a 12 month prescription), if clinically appropriate and safe to do so.
- You can find the new regulations **here**.
- A 12 month prescription will not be clinically appropriate or safe for all people. A quantity of medicine sufficient for 12 months will be the maximum, not a requirement. Prescribers will use their clinical judgement to determine what is appropriate for each person.

- The first dispensing of the prescription must occur within three months of the prescription being issued/written by the prescriber. This is both a legal and funding requirement.
- Repeats on all prescriptions, including those for quantities less than 12 months, may be dispensed up until 12 months after the prescription was issued. For example, if a prescription is written on 1 February 2026, repeats may be dispensed until 31 January 2027.
- If a prescriber does not want any further repeat supplies to be dispensed beyond a certain date or period, they should ensure this is clearly indicated on the prescription
- No repeats may legally be dispensed more than 12 months after the prescription was issued, meaning a delay between the prescription being issued/written and the first dispensing may result in a reduction in the total quantity of medicine that can be supplied.
- The pharmacy management system (PhMS) vendors will be in touch about any system changes they have developed to support 12 month prescriptions.
- Where there are any changes required, PhMS vendors will contact pharmacies directly.

Pharmaceutical Schedule changes and impacts

- Pharmac is **updating the Pharmaceutical Schedule funding rules** to support the new prescription lengths.

Special Authority Expiries

- Funding of repeat dispensings for medicines with expired Special Authorities will change.
- If the first dispensing of a medicine with a Special Authority approval is made before the expiry date, repeats may be dispensed to complete up to three months funded supply (even if the repeats are collected after the expiry date).
- For any further funded supply, a renewed Special Authority will be needed

Timing of repeat dispensing

Repeat dispensings will be funded:

- if the previous supply has run out, or
- two-thirds of the expected time between dispensings has passed, or
- two-thirds of the previous supply has been used.

Dispensing may occur earlier if:

- the supply has been lost or damaged, or
- the dose or frequency has changed, or
- there is another valid reason the pharmacist is aware of (such as the circumstances described in Rule 4.4.2 of the Pharmaceutical Schedule).

For any questions, e-mail enquiries@pharmac.govt.nz

What is not changing

- The maximum quantity of medicine that can legally be supplied on any one occasion is not changing and will remain at three months (six months for oral contraceptives), as it is now.
- Prescribers remain responsible for deciding the appropriate total quantity of medicine that can be supplied on a prescription to each person, based on individual needs and clinical judgement.
- Nothing is changing for controlled drugs such as opioids, ADHD stimulant medicines and benzodiazepines; the Misuse of Drugs Act and associated regulations remain unchanged.
- The **prescription co-payment** will continue to be charged once per prescription item. This means patients will only pay a prescription co-payment when they collect their initial medicine supply (first dispensing).
- There are no changes to prescription co-payment exemptions. For example, people under 14 years old or 65 years and older remain exempt.
- Nothing is changing for determining when a patient or whanau is eligible for a prescription subsidy card (PSC), see **here** for further information.

Patient messaging and awareness

- Health NZ will provide posters and flyers for display in pharmacies and general practices. These materials will explain the changes in simple terms and answer common questions.
- A public advertising campaign will launch closer to 1 February 2026 to raise public awareness and help patients understand what is changing and when.
- General practice, other prescriber and community pharmacies are encouraged to display these materials and share the key messages with patients.

Key messages to share with patients and the public

- From 1 February 2026, some people with stable, long-term health conditions may be able to get a 12 month prescription.
- Not everyone will get a 12 month prescription. Your prescriber will decide what is safe and appropriate for you.
- There will still be a maximum of three months' supply (six months for oral contraceptives) at a time, as there is now.
- Patients will continue to only pay one prescription co-payment per prescription item, when they collect their first supply from the pharmacy.
- Patients will still need to collect their repeats from the same pharmacy. Repeats cannot be transferred between pharmacies.
- There is no change to the maximum duration of supply for controlled drugs such as morphine, ADHD stimulant medicines like methylphenidate, benzodiazepines like temazepam, and zopiclone
- These changes will make it easier and cheaper for many people to get the medicines they need, with fewer trips to the doctor for prescriptions.
- Nothing has changed yet. Prescriptions are still issued/created for up to three months (six months for oral contraceptives) until the new rules come into effect.

