Consultation

PHARMAC
TE PĀTAKA WHAIORANGA

# Proposal to change lithium carbonate 250 mg brand

**19 November 2026**

## What we're proposing

Tell us what you think is needed, to support people taking lithium carbonate 250 mg to switch brands.

The current brand of lithium carbonate 250 mg capsules (Douglas) is being discontinued. Pharmac are proposing to replace the Douglas brand with Lithium Carbonate Essential Pharma tablets to ensure people still have access to a 250 mg strength presentation of lithium. The Douglas brand would remain funded for a transition period of five months.

Consultation closes on **3 December 2026** and feedback can be provided through our online form.

## What would the effect be?

From **1 February 2027**, a different brand of lithium carbonate 250 mg would be listed on the Pharmaceutical Schedule, Lithium Carbonate Essential Pharma, supplied by Clinect. They would be tablets instead of capsules.

There are no proposed changes to the funded long-acting lithium carbonate tablets, Priadel 400 mg.

Lithium has a narrow therapeutic index. This means that small changes in the amount of lithium in the body can affect how well it works or may lead to someone experiencing unwanted side effects. Because of this, people taking lithium need regular blood tests and monitoring, and would need additional support and monitoring during the brand change.

We are interested in feedback on measures that could support the successful implementation of the change to the new brand.

Examples may include patient and prescriber communications, Healthify consumer information updates, educational materials for healthcare professionals, including guidance on lithium monitoring during the transition, a pharmacy brand-switch fee, and updates to Health Pathways and the New Zealand Formulary.

Pharmac is unable to provide funding for additional GP consultations, specialist appointments, blood tests, or other healthcare services related to this brand change.

## Who we think will be interested

- People who take lithium and their whānau
- Healthcare professionals involved in the care of people with bipolar disorder
- Community and hospital pharmacies
- Wholesalers
- Mental Health Foundation
- Changing Minds
- Healthcare education providers

# About lithium carbonate and bipolar disorder

## What is lithium carbonate?

Lithium carbonate is an oral medicine used to help treat and prevent episodes of mania and depression in people with bipolar disorder. Lithium works by helping to stabilise mood and reduce extreme mood changes. It is one of the most established treatments for bipolar disorder and can help lower the risk of relapse and improve long-term wellbeing. People taking lithium need regular blood tests to make sure the medicine is working safely and to monitor for side effects.

## What is bipolar disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition that causes changes in a person's mood, energy levels, and ability to carry out everyday activities. People with bipolar disorder can experience periods of very high or elevated mood (called mania or hypomania) and periods of low mood (depression). These mood changes can affect sleep, concentration, behaviour, relationships, and daily functioning. Bipolar disorder is a long-term condition, but treatment can help people manage their symptoms and live well.

# Why we're proposing this

We are changing the brand and dose form of lithium carbonate 250 mg because the current supplier, Douglas, has had difficulties obtaining the active ingredient needed to make the medicine. Douglas can continue supplying the medicine until around mid-2027, but an alternative brand and presentation is required to ensure people have ongoing access to the 250 mg strength.

# Details about our proposal

From 1 February 2027, lithium carbonate 250 mg tablet (Lithium Carbonate Essential Pharma) would be listed in Section B and Part II of Section H of the Pharmaceutical Schedule as follows:

| Chemical | Formulation | Brand | Pack size | Price and subsidy |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lithium carbonate | Tab 250 mg | Lithium Carbonate Essential Pharma | 100 | $43.09 |

Pharmac previously funded the tablet formulation until 2020 where the brand and formulation changed from Lithicarb FC 250 mg tablets to Douglas 250 mg capsules.

From 1 July 2027, lithium carbonate 250 mg capsule (Douglas) would be delisted from Section B and Part II of Section H of the Pharmaceutical Schedule. This would allow a five month transition period where both brands are funded.

# To provide feedback

Fill out our online form by **3 December 2026**.



[INTERNAL USE ONLY]

All feedback received before the closing date will be considered by Pharmac's Board (or its delegate) prior to making a decision on this proposal.

## Your feedback may be shared

When you give feedback on a consultation, your feedback becomes official information that Pharmac holds. Pharmac has legal responsibilities for how we manage this official information, under laws such as the Official Information Act and Privacy Act.

Pharmac may receive a request from people for official information, which could include your feedback. Legally, Pharmac must consider whether your feedback should be released.

We will consider your views when assessing whether the feedback has to be released. Tell us if there is anything about your feedback that you would prefer wasn't released.

If your feedback is proposed for release, then Pharmac will contact you, unless there is a legal reason that we can't.

Note that Pharmac collects and holds your information in line with our Privacy Statement.



[INTERNAL USE ONLY]