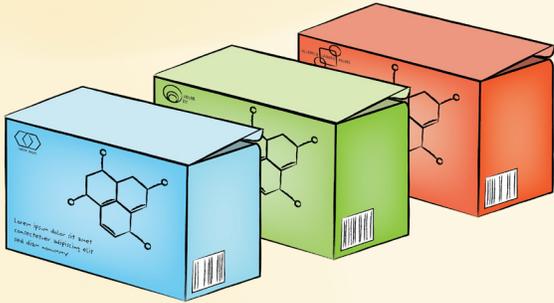


# Biosimilar biologics in Canada – What inflammatory arthritis patients need to know

Fifth Edition  
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# Biosimilar biologics in Canada

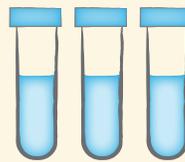
## A biosimilar biologic is highly similar to its originator biologic



Biosimilar medicines are biologic treatment options for patients living with chronic, disabling and life-threatening diseases, including inflammatory arthritis, cancer, diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease, multiple sclerosis and psoriasis.



After an originator biologic's patent expires, other companies are allowed to produce their own biosimilar version of it. Because biosimilars are produced post-patent, biosimilar manufacturers do not have the same costs to bring the product to market and can therefore offer it at a lower price.<sup>1</sup>



Biosimilar biologics have the same active ingredients as the originator biologic and have been shown to be as safe and effective.



Since 2009, Health Canada has approved 50 biosimilars.



## Biosimilars can improve access to high quality medicines and save public and private drug plans billions of dollars now and over the coming years



Biologic medicines make up some of public and private drug plans' largest drug expenditures, accounting for \$4.4 billion of public drug program spending (29.4% of total spending) in 2021.<sup>2</sup>



Biosimilar savings can be reinvested into public and private drug plan budgets making it possible to add new medications.



British Columbia was the first province to implement biosimilars transition policy in 2019 and will save more than \$227 million by 2024.



Biosimilar savings can help improve non-medication elements of care that patients need, such as specialized nursing, counseling, physio- and occupational therapy.

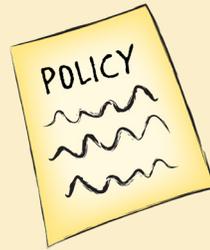


Biosimilars savings can modernize "special access criteria," removing the need for patients to fail on older therapies before approving reimbursement for biosimilars.

# Transitioning to a biosimilar biologic



**“Medical transition”** occurs when a patient, not doing well on their current originator or biosimilar, is transitioned to another originator or biosimilar to regain maximum disease control.



**“Policy transition”** occurs when a public or private drug plan’s reimbursement policy change necessitate patients to move from their originator to its biosimilar, usually because it is significantly less expensive.



Under a transition policy, patients have a certain period to discuss transitioning from an originator to a biosimilar with their prescriber and get a prescription for the biosimilar to keep their drug plan coverage.

Through the successful introduction and implementation of biosimilar transition policies, Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec, Alberta, New Brunswick, Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan are using biosimilars savings to improve the sustainability of their drug plans by adding new medicine listings and boosting existing medication coverage.

## Transitioning is safe and effective



Transitioning from an originator to its biosimilar has been safely and effectively practiced over the past 17 years with hundreds of thousands of patients with autoimmune diseases in Europe and North America with no compromise to patient safety, effectiveness or quality of care.



According to Health Canada: “No differences are expected in efficacy and safety following a change in routine use between a biosimilar and its reference biologic drug in an authorized indication.”<sup>3</sup>



Prior to transitioning, both physicians and their patients must be fully informed and have all available information about the biosimilar medicine, such as details about the reimbursement policy, patient support program information, including contact names and phone numbers.



## Learn more about biosimilars

Visit the **Biosimilars•Exchange** – Canada’s trusted source for timely news and information on biosimilar biologics.



## Share facts about biosimilars

Share this biosimilars infographic with another patient, with your health care professional, your family or anyone else you know who is having a conversation about biosimilars as an advanced therapy option.

1. Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH): Biosimilar Drugs: Your Questions Answered  
[https://www.cadth.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/biosimilar\\_drugs\\_patient\\_en.pdf](https://www.cadth.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/biosimilar_drugs_patient_en.pdf)

2. Canadian Institute for Health Information. Prescribed Drug Spending in Canada, 2021. Ottawa, ON: CIHI; 2022. Infographic  
<https://www.cihi.ca/en/prescribed-drug-spending-in-canada>

3. Health Canada Fact Sheet on Biosimilars: Switching  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/biologics-radiopharmaceuticals-genetic-therapies/applications-submissions/guidance-documents/fact-sheet-biosimilars.html#a17>

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# Foreword

## Biosimilar biologics in Canada – What inflammatory arthritis patients need to know

Biosimilar biologics (“biosimilars”) have been approved for use in Canada since 2009, and in arthritis since 2014. Fifty-two biosimilars are currently approved by Health Canada for chronic diseases, including inflammatory arthritis, cancer, inflammatory bowel disease, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and psoriasis. Since the European Union (EU) approved the first biosimilar in 2006, and in inflammatory arthritis in 2013, the EU has approved more than 88 biosimilars.

Based on scientific evidence and the lived experience of patients in North America and Europe, rheumatologists across Canada are now regularly prescribing biosimilars for newly initiated inflammatory arthritis patients. In full consultation with their patients, they are now also transitioning their experienced patients from originator biologic (“originator”) to its biosimilar.

Public and private drug plans have begun implementing policy transition (also called “non-medical switch”) requiring patients to move from their current originator to its biosimilar. Policy transition has been introduced and implemented in nine Canadian provinces and territories, including Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec, Alberta, New Brunswick, Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Yukon.

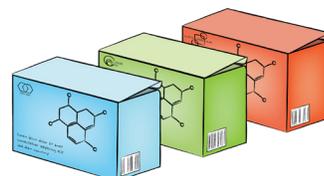
B.C. was the first province to implement biosimilars transition policy in May 2019 and has reported that thousands of patients living with inflammatory arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease and diabetes have been transitioned with no compromise to patient safety, effectiveness or quality of care.<sup>1</sup>

In this guide, we discuss important biosimilars facts for patients to understand if they are starting on or transitioning to a biosimilar. If you have any questions or wish to share feedback, please contact us at [feedback@jointhealth.org](mailto:feedback@jointhealth.org).

## About the Author

Arthritis Consumer Experts (ACE) has produced the “**Biosimilar biologics in Canada: What inflammatory arthritis patients need to know**” guide to address those needs of patients who want information on biosimilar medicines. It provides answers to questions patients may have on biosimilars and the information tools they need to power and support their conversations with their rheumatologists and other health care providers to ensure science-based continuity of care. If you would like to read more about biosimilar medicines, there are references for further information at the end of this guide or visit [jointhealth.org](http://jointhealth.org).

Arthritis Consumer Experts thanks Arthritis Research Canada for its review of the content in this guide.



## Biosimilar biologics overview

### What are biologics (originators and biosimilars)?

Over the past 22 years in Canada, biologics have improved the treatment for patients living with disabling and life-threatening chronic diseases, including inflammatory arthritis (IA), cancer, diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease, multiple sclerosis, and psoriasis.

Rheumatologists prescribe biologics to IA patients whose disease does not respond, or respond well enough, to conventional synthetic disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (csDMARDs) such as hydroxychloroquine or sulfasalazine. Biologics are proved to effectively address disease signs and symptoms – like swelling, pain and fatigue – but also may improve mortality and reduce heart disease and other complications of IA.

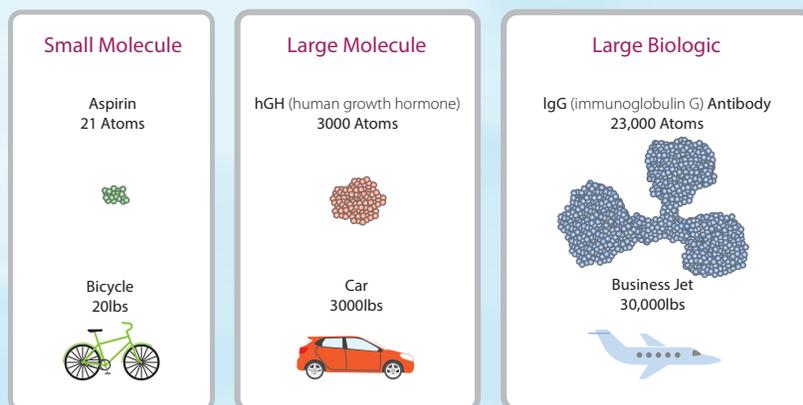
Biologics are made from living organisms like yeast and bacteria. The first version of a biologic developed is known as the “originator.” This is because they are the original version of a drug that a biosimilar is based on. Biologics are much larger and more complex in nature than conventional, small molecule medicines such as over-the-counter ibuprofen (e.g., Advil) or by-prescription methotrexate. (See Figure 1). Biologics are administered in two ways; by self-injection under the skin or into muscle, or by intravenous (IV) infusion into a vein in the hand, wrist or arm.

Because of their complexity, biologics are expensive and time consuming to develop. This can make it difficult for the healthcare system to afford them and limit patients’ access to biologics. According to data from the Canadian Institute of Health Information, public drug program spending on biologic medicines reached \$4.4 billion in 2021 (29% of total public drug program spending). And for the tenth consecutive year, anti-TNF biologic medicines used for rheumatoid arthritis and Crohn’s disease accounted for the highest proportion of that public drug spending total.<sup>2</sup>

Life-changing biologic medicines are complex, expensive to manufacture and continue to be a growing budget pressure for public and private drug plans.

Figure 1

### Size and Complexity of Molecular and Biologic Medications



## What are biosimilar biologics?

When the patent of an originator expires, other manufacturers are allowed to make a biosimilar version of the medicine. A biosimilar has similar effectiveness, safety, and quality and delivers the same therapeutic benefits to patients as its originator.<sup>3</sup>

Biosimilars are typically prescribed to inflammatory arthritis patients by a rheumatologist.

For example:

- adalimumab (Abralada<sup>®</sup>), adalimumab (Amgevita<sup>®</sup>), adalimumab (Hadlima<sup>®</sup>), adalimumab (Hulio<sup>®</sup>), adalimumab (Hyrimoz<sup>®</sup>), adalimumab (Idacio<sup>®</sup>), adalimumab (Simlandi<sup>®</sup>), and adalimumab (Yuflyma<sup>®</sup>) are biosimilar versions of the originator adalimumab (Humira<sup>®</sup>);
- etanercept (Brenzys<sup>®</sup>), etanercept (Erelzi<sup>®</sup>), and etanercept (Rymti<sup>®</sup>) are biosimilar versions of the originator etanercept (Enbrel<sup>®</sup>);
- infliximab (Avsola<sup>®</sup>), infliximab (Inflectra<sup>®</sup>), infliximab (Renflexis<sup>®</sup>), and infliximab (Remsima<sup>®</sup> SC) are biosimilar versions of the originator infliximab (Remicade<sup>®</sup>);
- rituximab (Riabni<sup>®</sup>), rituximab (Riximyo<sup>®</sup>), rituximab (Ruxience<sup>®</sup>), and rituximab (Truxima<sup>®</sup>) are biosimilar versions of the originator rituximab (Rituxan<sup>®</sup>).

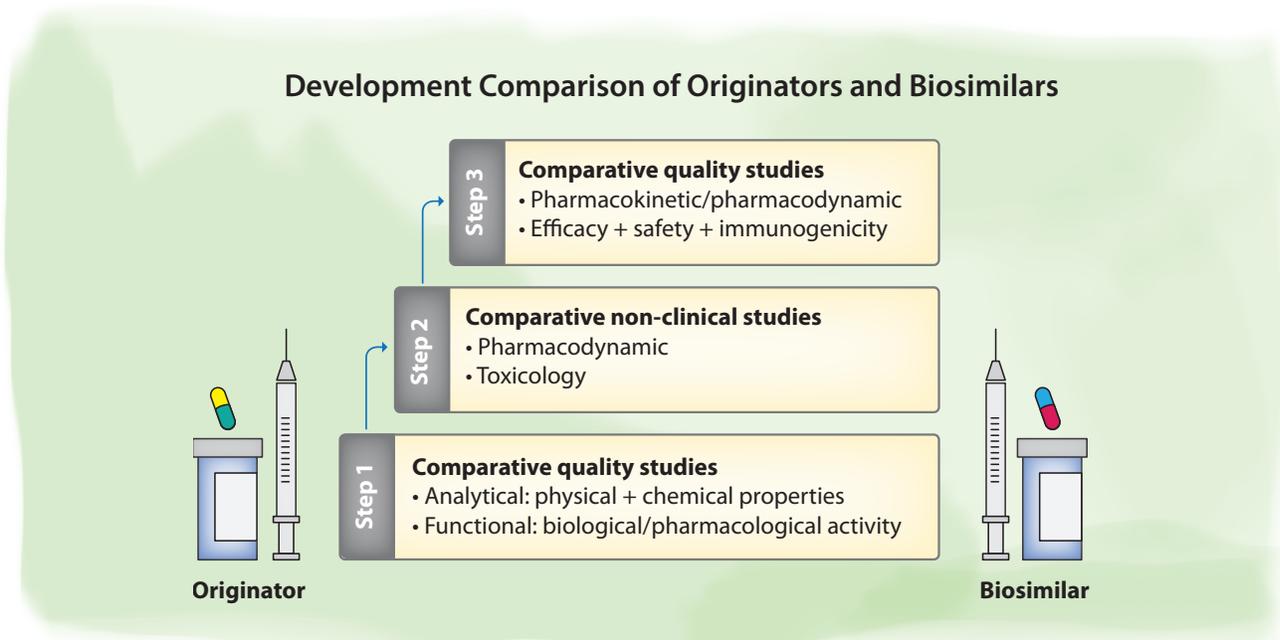
For a current list of all the biosimilars across different diseases that Health Canada has reviewed, go to the Health Canada's [Drug Product Database](#).

When the patent of an originator expires, other manufacturers are allowed to make a biosimilar version of the medicine.

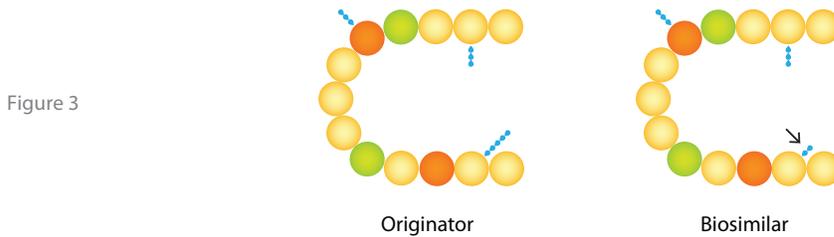
## Are the originator and biosimilar identical?

Due to the size, complexity and natural variability of biologic medications, a biosimilar and its originator can be shown to be similar, but not identical.

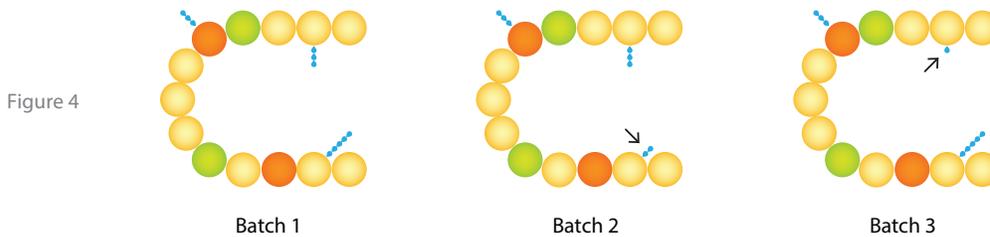
Figure 2



The diagram below (Figure 3) shows the slight differences that occur between originator and biosimilar because they are both made from living cell lines. The arrows in the diagrams below point to slight differences that do not involve the active or “medicinal” part of the biosimilar. The slight difference is called “glycosylation”, or simply put, sugar molecules. Minor differences between the originator and the biosimilar in clinically inactive components are acceptable and are not known to make a difference in the way the medicine works in the body.



Biologics – originators and biosimilars – are made in “batches” (See Figure 4). There are very small differences between different batches of an originator biologic. This is because they are made using living organisms with some tiny natural differences. The same goes for the slight differences between a biosimilar and its originator, which are also not clinically meaningful.



Because biosimilars are produced post-patent, biosimilar manufacturers do not have the same costs to bring the product to market and can therefore offer it at a lower price.<sup>4</sup> The potential savings generated by biosimilars may be reinvested into healthcare resources needed by Canadian patients.

Health Canada’s Biosimilar Biologic Drug web site page provides information about biosimilars including a fact sheet, relevant guidance documents, scientific advice meetings and links to approved drugs: <http://bit.ly/HealthCanadaBiosimilarEN>

### The biosimilar biologic review process in Canada

A biosimilar can enter the market after an originator patent expires and after a thorough review by Health Canada. Because the safety and effectiveness of the biologic originator are already well known, if the biosimilar medicine is very similar in structure and works as well, Health Canada does not require all clinical studies to be repeated. Instead, studies aim to show that there are no clinically meaningful differences between the biosimilar and the originator.<sup>5</sup> Biosimilars have been approved for use in Canada since 2009. Fifty-two biosimilars are currently approved by Health Canada.

The key principles that Health Canada uses to evaluate biosimilars are aligned with those of other regulators and international organizations such as the European Medicines Agency (EMA), the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the World Health Organization and

the International Coalition of Medicines Regulatory Authorities (ICMRA). In July 2019, the ICMRA issued a statement on biosimilars, providing assurance on the regulatory processes for the authorization and monitoring of biosimilars medicines and highlighting the benefits they can provide for patients and healthcare systems in terms of increased treatment alternatives, access and cost competitiveness.<sup>6</sup>

Since the EU approved the first biosimilar in 2006, it has approved the highest number of biosimilars worldwide (88), amassing considerable experience of their use and safety. During this period, the EU monitoring system for safety concerns has not identified any relevant difference in the nature, severity or frequency of side effects between biosimilars and their originators.

Today, the total clinical experience with biosimilar medicines exceeds 2 billion patient treatment days with EU-approved biosimilars and no new safety concerns have emerged that were not previously observed with the originator medicine.<sup>7</sup> During this period the EMA states: “The evidence acquired over 10 years of clinical experience shows that biosimilars approved through EMA can be used as safely and effectively in all their approved indications as other biological medicines.”<sup>8</sup>

## Benefits to patients and healthcare systems



Reinvestment of biosimilar savings can improve the healthcare system for Canadians.

Underlying Health Canada’s approach to authorizing biosimilars are the benefits to society the use of biosimilars can bring to patients and the healthcare system. Biosimilars can be used for the same therapeutic aim as their originator and offer an opportunity to reduce spending on more costly originators. These savings may be reinvested into improving the healthcare system for Canadians.

The Canadian Government’s Patented Medicine Prices Review Board has estimated that private and public drug plans across Canada could save from \$332 million to \$1.81 billion in the third year following biosimilar entry across a portfolio of products.<sup>9</sup>

## Extrapolation

Once studies show that the biosimilar works as well as the originator medicine with no clinically meaningful differences, Health Canada can approve the biosimilar for the same diseases as its originator based on the previously established efficacy and safety of the originator in each disease.<sup>10</sup> All the major health regulators around the world agree there is no need to repeat the clinical studies for each disease.

## Post marketing surveillance: How the safety of biosimilar biologics is monitored after review and if approved

Tracking the efficacy, safety and value to patients and the healthcare system of both originators and their biosimilars is important. Patients and their physicians rely on this “real-world data” when they are making treatment decisions.

Health Canada monitors the safety of all medications on the market, including biosimilars. Specifically, Health Canada:

- Conducts market surveillance
- Monitors adverse reaction reports
- Investigates complaints and problem reports
- Takes action as appropriate

Each manufacturer must do its part for drug safety; including:

- Set up a system to monitor reported side effects;
- Report any new information received about serious side effects to Health Canada;
- Notify Health Canada about any studies with new safety information;
- Request authorization for any major changes to:
  - the manufacturing process,
  - dose regimen, or
  - recommended uses of the medicine.<sup>11</sup>



## Biosimilar biologics library

- Health Canada Fact Sheet: Biosimilar Biologics  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/biologics-radiopharmaceuticals-genetic-therapies/applications-submissions/guidance-documents/fact-sheet-biosimilars.html>
- Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH): Biosimilar Drugs: Your Questions Answered  
[https://www.cadth.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/biosimilar\\_drugs\\_patient\\_en.pdf](https://www.cadth.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/biosimilar_drugs_patient_en.pdf)
- Ontario Drug Policy Research Network: Current and Prospective Utilization of Innovator Biologics and Biosimilars in Ontario  
<https://odprn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Utilization-of-Innovator-Biologics-and-Biosimilars-in-Ontario.pdf>
- Patented Medicines Prices Review Board: *Potential Savings from Biosimilars in Canada*.  
[https://www.pmprb-cepmb.gc.ca/CMFiles/NPDUIS/2017\\_Conference\\_Posters/post\\_6\\_biosim.pdf](https://www.pmprb-cepmb.gc.ca/CMFiles/NPDUIS/2017_Conference_Posters/post_6_biosim.pdf)
- pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance: Pan-Canadian Oncology Biosimilars Initiative  
<https://www.cancercareontario.ca/en/programs/provincial-drug-reimbursement/oncology-biosimilars-initiative>
- International Coalition of Medicines Regulatory Authorities (ICMRA) statement about confidence in biosimilar products  
[http://www.icmra.info/drupal/sites/default/files/2019-07/ICMRA\\_statement\\_about\\_confidence\\_in\\_biosimilar\\_product\\_HCP.PDF](http://www.icmra.info/drupal/sites/default/files/2019-07/ICMRA_statement_about_confidence_in_biosimilar_product_HCP.PDF)
- European Medicines Agency and The European Commission: Biosimilars in the EU: Information Guide for Healthcare Professionals  
[https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/documents/leaflet/biosimilars-eu-information-guide-healthcare-professionals\\_en.pdf](https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/documents/leaflet/biosimilars-eu-information-guide-healthcare-professionals_en.pdf)
- European Medicines Agency: Biosimilars Medicines: Overview  
<https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/human-regulatory/overview/biosimilar-medicines-overview>
- FDA Biosimilars Home Page  
<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/therapeutic-biologics-applications-bla/biosimilars>

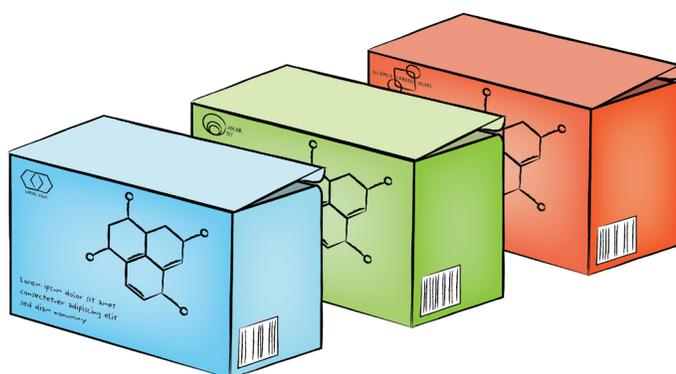
## How do patients and healthcare systems benefit from biosimilar biologics?

Biologics take years to research, develop and manufacture, making them expensive when they come into the marketplace. Healthcare systems limit reimbursement access to biologics through “special access criteria” – a patient must be, or get, very sick before public or private drug plans will pay for them. As a result, all patients who medically need a biologic therapy may not qualify for reimbursement coverage because the criteria are too difficult to meet.

Since the entry of biologics into the Canadian market, the use of biologics has been higher in Canada than in most comparable international markets. According to data from the Canadian Institute of Health Information, public drug program spending on biologic medicines reached \$4.4 billion in 2021 (29% of total public drug program spending). One of these biologic drug classes, anti-TNF medicines, used to treat diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and Crohn’s disease, accounted for the highest proportion of public drug spending for the tenth consecutive year.<sup>12</sup>

Biosimilars can be used for the same therapeutic aim as their originator and offer an opportunity to reduce spending on more costly originators. Biosimilars can create three main benefits to patients, the healthcare system, and society:

1. **Savings from biosimilars use can modernize “special access criteria”.** Currently, patients must try and fail treatment on older, less expensive medications. Because biosimilars are significantly less expensive, public and private drug plans can remove the need for patients to fail on these older therapies before approving reimbursement for them.
2. **Savings from biosimilars use can be reinvested into public and private drug plan budgets** making it possible to improve the sustainability of their drug plans by adding new medication listings and boosting existing medicine coverage for patients.
3. **Savings from biosimilars should be invested into non-medication types of care** that patients need, such as specialized nursing, counselling, physiotherapy and occupational therapy.



## Biosimilar biologics: Frequently asked questions



### Are biosimilar biologics generic medicines?

Biosimilar and originator medicines are not the same as the more common generic medicines such as aspirin or ibuprofen. Generic medicines are small molecules (usually “pills”) that are chemically synthesized. They contain identical medicinal ingredients to their reference products. When a drug patent expires, pharmaceutical companies can copy that branded drug, and sell it for significantly less as a generic.

Biosimilars are allowed to enter the marketplace when the patent of the originator expires. Biosimilars, like generic medications, are lower priced versions of brand name (“originator”) medicines. Originator biologics have already set the foundation of research and development for biosimilars, which means biosimilars are more cost-effective to produce and lead to similar outcomes. But biosimilars are not the same as generic medicines because biologics are often large and complex and cannot be exactly copied.

### My rheumatologist and I are thinking about choosing a biosimilar biologic for my treatment: Is it going to be safe and effective?

Patients understandably have many questions when prescribed a biologic, whether it’s an originator or biosimilar. This places a great deal of importance on the conversation about biologics between a patient and their health care provider.

Many studies compare biosimilars to the originator drugs and find them to be as safe and effective. To receive Health Canada’s approval, a biosimilar must demonstrate that it is highly similar and has no clinically meaningful differences in safety and efficacy compared to the originator.<sup>13</sup>

As with any treatment, it is important patients have a thorough conversation with their prescriber about all available therapeutic options, the safety, benefits and risks, patient treatment goals and the differences between the medications, before coming to a decision

### Why do biosimilar biologics cost less than originator biologics?

A manufacturer of biologics must spend many years studying a new biologic medicine before it can be approved for sale in Canada. The company then holds a patent on the medicine that prevents other companies from selling that product. This allows the originator manufacturer to earn back the money it spent on bringing the product to market. When the patent of an originator expires, other manufacturers are allowed to make a biosimilar version of the medicine. Originator biologics have already set the foundation of research and development for biosimilars, which means biosimilars are more cost-effective to produce and can be offered at a lower price.<sup>14</sup>

### **What should I do if I think I have a side effect?**

For people living with inflammatory arthritis, the greatest risk while taking a biologic is infection. Biologic medications – originator or biosimilar - may make it harder for these patients' immune system to fight off infections.<sup>15</sup> The likelihood of experiencing infection or any other side effects vary from person to person.

As with any biologics (originator or biosimilar), in cases where you suspect you may have a side effect, both you and your rheumatologist or pharmacist should report it. This helps authorities to continuously monitor the safety of medicines in the wider population.

### **Why aren't all studies conducted by the originator biologic maker repeated with the biosimilar biologic maker?**

Because the safety and effectiveness of the originator are already well known, if the biosimilar is very similar in structure and has the same biological activity, not all clinical studies need to be repeated.

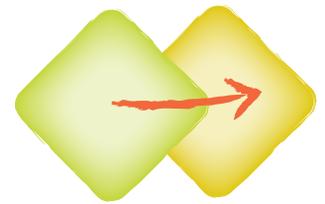
### **What is immunogenicity and how is it addressed for biosimilar biologics?**

The immune system has evolved to recognize foreign proteins in the body. Biologics are usually given by injection, which can cause the body's immune system to react to them. This is referred to as immunogenicity. Sometimes immunogenicity can only be detected using sophisticated laboratory tests and has no impact on the patient. In other cases, immunogenicity can impact patient safety or how well the medication works. For these reasons, studies showing that there are no clinically meaningful differences in immunogenicity between the biosimilar and originator are required for authorization of a biosimilar. In addition, biosimilar manufacturers are responsible to monitor the immunogenicity potential of the biosimilar after it is used in Canada.<sup>16</sup>

# Biosimilar biologic transition overview

## Transitioning from an originator biologic to a biosimilar biologic

The leading regulators in the world – including the European Medicines Agency, Food & Drug Administration in the U.S and Health Canada – support well-controlled transitions (“switches”) to biosimilars. Patients need to know transition policy has been safely and effectively implemented over the past 16 years with tens of thousands of patients with autoimmune diseases such as inflammatory arthritis in many countries in Europe and North America with no compromise to patient safety, effectiveness or quality of care.



## Transitioning terminology

“**Transitioning**” or “**switching**” means a patient is moved from one medication to another. In the case of biologics, there are two types of transitions:

“**Medical transition**” occurs in the case of a patient not doing well on their current originator or biosimilar who is transitioned to another originator or biosimilar, based on a decision by the patient and their rheumatologist, in order to regain maximum disease control.

“**Policy transition**” (sometimes referred to as “non-medical switch”) occurs when a public or private drug plan’s reimbursement policy necessitate patients move from their current originator to its biosimilar.

Even though less expensive biosimilar provide the same therapeutic benefits as their originators, the uptake in Canada of biosimilars continues to be very low.

## Biosimilar biologic transitioning experience in Canada

When considering a transition to biosimilar, Health Canada states: “No differences are expected in efficacy and safety following a change in routine use between a biosimilar and its reference biologic drug in an authorized indication.”

Annual spending on biologics continues to rise dramatically for public and private drug plans in Canada. At the same time, 52 Health Canada approved biosimilar biologics are now available, including biosimilar options for two of Canada’s biggest selling originator biologics - Remicade and Humira. With a roughly 40%-50% discount on the price of originators (depending on molecule), biosimilars offer significant savings to private and public drug plans.

For the past seven years, federal, provincial, territorial and private insurance drug plans have mandated the use first of biosimilar versions ahead of their originators for treatment-naive patients (patients who have not previously received the biologic in question). Since 2019, provinces and territories in Canada have also successfully implemented biosimilar transition policies to expand the use of biosimilar medicines and ensure access to high-quality, essential medications remains sustainable.

In the context of biosimilar use, Health Canada considers “switching between authorized products to refer to a change from routine use of one specific product to routine use of another specific product. Patients and health care providers can have confidence that biosimilars are effective and safe for each of their authorized indications. No differences are

expected in efficacy and safety following a change in routine use between a biosimilar and its reference biologic drug in an authorized indication.”<sup>17</sup>

Under a transition policy, patients have a certain period to discuss with their prescriber transitioning from an originator to a biosimilar and get a prescription for the biosimilar in order to keep their drug plan coverage. Patients unable to transition to the biosimilar for medical reasons can make exceptional requests for continued coverage of the originator.

Prior to transitioning, both physicians and their patients must be fully informed and have all available information about the biosimilar medicine, such as details about the reimbursement policy, patient support program information, including contact names and phone numbers.



### **Biosimilar biologic policy in publicly funded drug plans**

On March 29, 2023, the Government of Yukon announced it was enhancing the public drug plan with the implementation of a new policy where affected Yukoners enrolled in Pharmacare or the Chronic Disease and Disability Benefits program will need to transition from their current biologic drug to a biosimilar over a six month transition period.<sup>18</sup>

Newfoundland and Labrador became the ninth Canadian province and territory on March 24, 2023 to implement biosimilars transition policy, which moves patients from certain originator biologics to the biosimilar versions.<sup>19</sup>

In December 2022, Ontario announced it was expanding the use of biosimilars for Ontarians. Starting March 31, 2023, Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) recipients who are on an originator biologic will begin to transition to a Health Canada approved biosimilar version of the drug at no cost.<sup>20</sup>

In November 2022, Saskatchewan launched its Biosimilar Initiative, where approximately 24,000 existing patients are expected to transition to a biosimilar version by April 30, 2023.<sup>21</sup>

Nova Scotia announced its new transition policy in February 2022, which involves medications used for inflammatory arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease and psoriasis, as well as certain insulins used to treat diabetes.<sup>22</sup>

In December 2021, Northwest Territories launched a Biosimilars Initiative with expected savings from the implementation of transition policy is to be reinvested to help fund coverage by increasing the medications that the supplementary health benefits programs cover in the future.<sup>23</sup>

Quebec changed its coverage in May 2021 through the Public Prescription Drug Insurance Plan and required patients to transition from the originator medicine that they are currently on to a biosimilar version of that medicine.<sup>24</sup>

In April 2021, New Brunswick launched its Biosimilars Initiative.<sup>25</sup>

Alberta announced in December 2019 its Biosimilar Initiative to expand the use of biosimilar medications through transition policy, explaining “patients will continue receiving the same safe and effective treatment, but at a lower cost.”<sup>26</sup>

In May 2019, British Columbia was the first province to implement biosimilars transition policy. Since implementation, B.C. has reported that thousands of patients living

with inflammatory arthritis, diabetes and inflammatory bowel disease have been safely transitioned.<sup>27</sup> Through the launch of its biosimilars switching policy, British Columbia stated it is improving the sustainability of its PharmaCare program by adding new medicine listings and boosting existing medication coverage for patients.<sup>28</sup>

For up-to-date information about biosimilars policies for each provincial and territorial public drug plan, please click [here](#).

## **Why are public drug plans transitioning patients from an originator biologic to a biosimilar biologic?**

A key benefit of transitioning patients is hundreds of millions of dollars in cost savings to the healthcare system. Biosimilars have the potential to improve access to biologics (both originators and biosimilars) and save public and private healthcare systems billions of dollars now, and over the coming year.

The Patent Medicines Prices Review Board estimates that Ontario could save more than \$200 million annually with the implementation of its biosimilar transition policy.<sup>29</sup> The Ontario Ministry of Health has stated its transition policy will allow Ontario to fund more new drug therapies, continue to grow the roster of publicly funded life-saving drugs, bring innovation to the health care system and continue to deliver better, connected patient care.

At the announcement of the expansion of its Biosimilars Initiative program in August 2020, the B.C. government stated the third phase would allow it to put another \$30.7 million over the next three years, in addition to the \$96.6 million from earlier phases of the Biosimilars Initiative, back into BC's healthcare system.<sup>30</sup> In April 2021, the B.C. government added another biosimilar (adalimumab) for provincial coverage, citing additional savings of over \$100 million over three years.<sup>31</sup>

When it announced its biosimilars transition policy in December 2019, the Alberta government claimed switching to biosimilars would save between \$227 million and \$380 million over the next four years once fully implemented.<sup>32</sup> Quebec's biosimilar policy is expected to generate annual savings of \$100 million by 2022, which will be reinvested in Quebec's healthcare system and will help improve access to innovative drug therapies.<sup>33</sup> In Saskatchewan, the Ministry of Health estimates that the province will see annual savings of approximately \$20 million once patients complete the transition to biosimilars by May 1, 2023.<sup>34</sup>

## **Transition experience and policy in Europe**

Policy transition has been successfully implemented in many European countries over the past 17 years and in tens of thousands of patients living with serious chronic disease with no compromise to patient safety or quality of care.

European Union (EU) member countries generally agree that EU approved biosimilars are considered alternative therapeutic options to their respective originators, under the supervision of a clinical decision maker. The majority of countries, including England, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Portugal support physician led transitioning for biosimilars.

In the EU, like in Canada, the ruling regulatory body (European Medicines Agency, the European equivalent to Health Canada) leaves the decision on biosimilar transitioning to individual

member countries (comparable to federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions or private drug plans decision making in Canada).

The EU Consortium of Individual Regulators in 2017 concluded that because of the high similarity, there is no reason to believe that the body's immune system would react differently to the biosimilar compared with the originator upon a switch. This view is supported by the current experience with biosimilars on the market and by literature data. (Kurki et al. – Interchangeability of biosimilars: A European perspective) <http://bit.ly/InterchangeabilityBiosimilars>

## Research

Since biosimilar biologics were first approved in the European Union (EU) in 2006, hundreds of thousands of EU patients with autoimmune diseases such as inflammatory arthritis and inflammatory bowel diseases have been using biosimilars with no compromise to patient safety or quality of care. Europe remains the global leader with over 50% of biosimilar utilization.<sup>35</sup>

More than 200 research studies exist looking at patients who have successfully policy transitioned from a TNF inhibitor originator biologic to its TNF inhibitor biosimilar biologic and show no health differences between patients. Here is the latest evidence and reading on biosimilars transitioning:

- Safety, Immunogenicity and Interchangeability of Biosimilar Monoclonal Antibodies and Fusion Proteins: A Regulatory Perspective  
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40265-021-01601-2>
- Switching Reference Medicines to Biosimilars: A Systematic Literature Review of Clinical Outcomes  
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40265-018-0881-y>
- Kurki et al. – Interchangeability of biosimilars: A European perspective  
<http://bit.ly/InterchangeabilityBiosimilars>

## Learn more about biosimilars transitioning

To stay informed, go to these sources for the latest research in North America and Europe:

- Canadian Rheumatology Association Position Statement on Biosimilars  
<https://rheum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CRA-Biosimilars-Position-Statement-and-FAQ.pdf>
- Canadian Rheumatology Association Biosimilar FAQ  
<https://rheum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CRA-Biosimilars-Position-Statement-and-FAQ.pdf>
- Ontario Rheumatology Association Biosimilar Position Statement  
<https://ontariorheum.ca/updated-ora-position-statement-biosimilar-switching>
- European Medicines Agency: Biosimilars in the EU  
[https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/documents/leaflet/biosimilars-eu-information-guide-healthcare-professionals\\_en.pdf](https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/documents/leaflet/biosimilars-eu-information-guide-healthcare-professionals_en.pdf)
- American College of Rheumatology  
<https://assets.contentstack.io/v3/assets/bltee37abb6b278ab2c/bltf25f8abcefb66dbb/6335de4526327a24983268e0/acr-position-statement-biosimilars.pdf>
- PubMed (National Center for Biotechnology Information)  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/>

## What is the NOCEBO effect?

Transitioning patients from originators to biosimilars is associated with the potential for a “nocebo” effect, a phenomenon that occurs when a patient’s negative expectation causes a treatment to have a more negative effect than it otherwise would—essentially, the opposite of the placebo effect.

The way in which rheumatologists and other health care providers communicate with patients about transitioning to a biosimilar is key to preventing the nocebo effect. Patients should be informed about the transition well in advance, and the availability of research-based information is important for patient understanding and empowerment. Finally, an appointment with a rheumatologist to discuss biosimilar transitioning should ideally allow enough time with the patient to understand the concept of biosimilars and transitioning and to address any concerns properly.

### Having a fact-based biosimilar biologic transition conversation with your health care professional

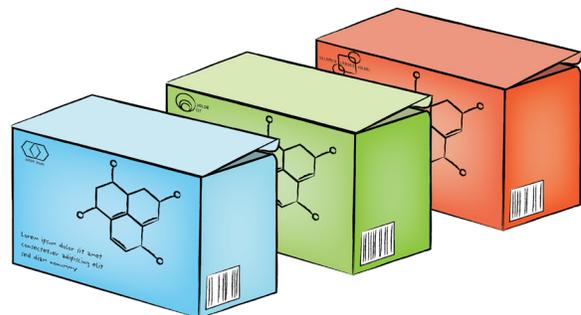
Based on real-world experience, prior to transitioning patients, both rheumatologists and their patients must be fully informed about the policy requiring the transition and have all available information about the biosimilar.

The key for patients going through policy transition is to be able to access science-based information to support their conversations with their healthcare team. Health care professionals should be able to provide the patient education materials in “easy-to-read” language to help them understand the principles of biosimilars and the reasons for transition and the scientific evidence that supports it.

There are several other credible places patients transitioning from one biologic to another (whether from originator to biosimilar, originator to originator, or biosimilar to originator) can go for information and support:

- Patient support program
- Public or private drug plan web sites
- Patient organizations such as **Arthritis Consumer Experts**

Based on real-world experience, prior to transitioning patients, both rheumatologists and their patients must be fully informed about the policy requiring the transition and have all available information about the biosimilar.



- 1 B.C. Ministry of Health: Biosimilars Initiative for patients - History of previous biosimilars listings  
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/pharmacare-for-bc-residents/what-we-cover/biosimilars-initiative-patients>
- 2 Canadian Institute of Health Information. Prescribed Drug Spending in Canada, 2021. Ottawa, ON: CIHI; 2022. Infographic  
<https://www.cihi.ca/en/prescribed-drug-spending-in-canada>
- 3 Health Canada Fact Sheet on Biosimilars  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/biologics-radiopharmaceuticals-genetic-therapies/applications-submissions/guidance-documents/fact-sheet-biosimilars.html>
- 4 Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH): Biosimilar Drugs: Your Questions Answered  
[https://www.cadth.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/biosimilar\\_drugs\\_patient\\_en.pdf](https://www.cadth.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/biosimilar_drugs_patient_en.pdf)
- 5 Health Canada Fact Sheet on Biosimilars: Information requirement for initial authorization of a biosimilar  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/biologics-radiopharmaceuticals-genetic-therapies/applications-submissions/guidance-documents/fact-sheet-biosimilars.html#a5>
- 6 ICMRA statement about confidence in biosimilar products (for healthcare professionals)  
[https://www.icmra.info/drupal/sites/default/files/2019-07/ICMRA\\_statement\\_about\\_confidence\\_in\\_biosimilar\\_product\\_HCP.PDF](https://www.icmra.info/drupal/sites/default/files/2019-07/ICMRA_statement_about_confidence_in_biosimilar_product_HCP.PDF)
- 7 Medicines for Europe: Biosimilar use in Europe (December 2020)  
<https://www.medicinesforeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/BIOS5.pdf>
- 8 European Medicines Agency: Biosimilars in the EU  
[https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/documents/leaflet/biosimilars-eu-information-guide-healthcare-professionals\\_en.pdf](https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/documents/leaflet/biosimilars-eu-information-guide-healthcare-professionals_en.pdf)
- 9 Patented Medicines Prices Review Board. *Potential Savings from Biosimilars in Canada*. Date modified: 2018-02-05  
[https://www.pmprb-cepmb.gc.ca/CMFiles/NPDUIS/2017\\_Conference\\_Posters/post\\_6\\_biosim.pdf](https://www.pmprb-cepmb.gc.ca/CMFiles/NPDUIS/2017_Conference_Posters/post_6_biosim.pdf)
- 10 Health Canada: Biosimilar biologic drugs in Canada: Fact Sheet – Authorizing Indications  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/biologics-radiopharmaceuticals-genetic-therapies/applications-submissions/guidance-documents/fact-sheet-biosimilars.html#a7>
- 11 Health Canada: Biosimilar biologic drugs in Canada: Fact Sheet – How we monitor the safety of biosimilars after they have been authorized  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/biologics-radiopharmaceuticals-genetic-therapies/applications-submissions/guidance-documents/fact-sheet-biosimilars.html#a10>
- 12 Canadian Institute for Health Information. Prescribed Drug Spending in Canada, 2021. Ottawa, ON: CIHI; 2022. Infographic  
<https://www.cihi.ca/en/prescribed-drug-spending-in-canada>

**13 Health Canada Biosimilars Fact Sheet: Biosimilars Explained**

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/biologics-radiopharmaceuticals-genetic-therapies/applications-submissions/guidance-documents/fact-sheet-biosimilars.html>

**14 Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH): Biosimilar Drugs: Your Questions Answered**

[https://www.cadth.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/biosimilar\\_drugs\\_patient\\_en.pdf](https://www.cadth.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/biosimilar_drugs_patient_en.pdf)

**15 Arthritis Society of Canada: Biologics and Biosimilars for the Treatment of Inflammatory Arthritis**

<https://arthritis.ca/getmedia/d77ec1aa-62ee-496d-9902-b82f3df88eb8/Biologics-and-Biosimilars-forTreatment-of-Arthritis-ENG.pdf>

**16 Health Canada: Biosimilar biologic drugs in Canada: Fact Sheet - Immunogenicity and how we address it for biosimilars**

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/biologics-radiopharmaceuticals-genetic-therapies/applications-submissions/guidance-documents/fact-sheet-biosimilars.html#a9>

**17 Health Canada Fact Sheet on Biosimilars: Switching**

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/biologics-radiopharmaceuticals-genetic-therapies/applications-submissions/guidance-documents/fact-sheet-biosimilars.html#a17>

**18 News Release: Yukon government enhances public drug plan with biosimilars**

<https://yukon.ca/en/news/yukon-government-enhances-public-drug-plan-biosimilars>

**19 NLPDP Biosimilar Initiative**

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/hcs/prescription/biosimilars/>

**20 News Release: Ontario Expanding Safe Use of Biosimilars**

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1002611/ontario-expanding-safe-use-of-biosimilars>

**21 Saskatchewan Biosimilars Initiative**

<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2022/october/20/saskatchewan-launches-biosimilars-initiative>

**22 Nova Scotia biosimilars initiative**

<https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20220204002>

**23 Northwest Territories Biosimilars Initiative**

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/biosimilar-initiative>

**24 Minister of Health and Social Services – Prescription Drug Insurance**

<https://www.ramq.gouv.qc.ca/en/citizens/prescription-drug-insurance/know-conditions-coverage>

**25 New Brunswick Biosimilars Initiative**

<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/health/MedicarePrescriptionDrugPlan/NBDrugPlan/biosimilars.html>

**26 Alberta Health: Biosimilar Drugs**

<https://www.alberta.ca/biosimilar-drugs.aspx>

**27 B.C. Ministry of Health: Biosimilars Initiative for patients - History of previous biosimilars listings**

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/pharmacare-for-bc-residents/what-we-cover/biosimilars-initiative-patients>

**28 British Columbia Ministry of Health: Biosimilars Initiative**

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2019HLTH0080-001072>

**29 Patented Medicines Prices Review Board, “Biosimilars in Canada: Building momentum in the wake of recent switching policies”**

<https://www.canada.ca/en/patented-medicine-prices-review/services/npduis/analytical-studies/slide-presentations/biosimilars-cadth-2021.html>

**30 B.C. Government News: B.C. expands biosimilar program**

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020HLTH0257-001569>

**31 B.C.’s biosimilars program expands**

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021HLTH0067-000653>

**32 Alberta Biosimilars Initiative**

<https://www.alberta.ca/biosimilar-drugs.aspx>

**33 Le ministre Christian Dubé annonce un virage vers les médicaments biosimilaires, Québec, le 18 mai 2021 (in French only)**

<https://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/ministere/salle-de-presse/communiqué-2864/>

**34 Saskatchewan Launches Biosimilars Initiative**

<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2022/october/20/saskatchewan-launches-biosimilars-initiative>

**35 Medicines for Europe infographic May 2022**

<https://www.medicinesforeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Facts-and-figures-BIOS-2022.pdf>

## About ACE

Arthritis Consumer Experts (ACE) is a national organization that provides free science-based information and education programs in both official languages to people with arthritis. ACE serves people living with all forms of arthritis by helping them take control of their disease and improve their quality of life. Founded and led by people with arthritis, ACE actively advocates on arthritis health and policy issues through ACE's JointHealth™ family of programs and the Arthritis Broadcast Network. ACE is guided by a strict set of guiding principles established by an advisory board comprised of leading scientists, medical professionals and informed arthritis consumers.

ACE has been a leader in biosimilars discussions and education since 2009, sharing information with stakeholders across Canada through free research-based workshops, webinars and education programs. Drawing from this experience, ACE has created the Biosimilars•Exchange, an information hub for consumers to get the latest biosimilars news and background analysis. <https://biosimilars.jointhealth.org>

ACE has produced a special biosimilars education video series, where ACE speaks to medical experts on key patient questions around biosimilars and transitioning from originators to biosimilars: Go to <https://biosimilars.jointhealth.org/resources> and click on "Biosimilar biologics education videos."

## About this Guide

This guide has been prepared by Arthritis Consumer Experts (ACE) in collaboration with its advisory board comprised of leading scientists and medical professionals and will be updated and improved regularly as new research and information on biosimilars become available.

This guide was published in April 2023. This information will be updated online and available for download in PDF format at <https://biosimilars.jointhealth.org>.

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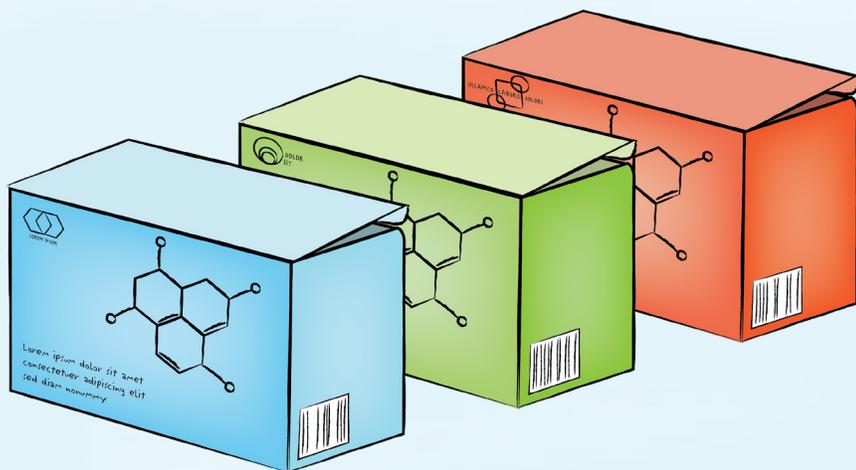
Over the past 12 months, ACE received grants-in-aid from: Arthritis Research Canada, Amgen Canada, Biosimilars Canada, Canadian Biosimilars Forum, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Canadian Rheumatology Association, Eli Lilly Canada, JAMP Pharma, Novartis Canada, Organon Canada, Pfizer Canada, Sandoz Canada, Teva Canada, UCB Canada, and the University of British Columbia.

ACE also receives unsolicited donations from its community members (people with arthritis) across Canada.

ACE thanks funders for their support to help the nearly 6 million Canadians living with osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis and the many other forms of the disease.

### Disclaimer

The material contained in this guide is provided for general information only. This guide should not be relied on to suggest a course of treatment for a particular individual or as a substitute for consultation with qualified health professionals who are familiar with your individual medical needs. It is meant to inform the discussion that you have with health care professionals, as well as others who play a role in your treatment and care. Should you have any health care related questions, you should contact your physician.



# Biosimilars biologics in Canada – What inflammatory arthritis patients need to know

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Arthritis Consumer Experts thanks Arthritis Research Canada for its review of the “Biosimilar biologics in Canada – What inflammatory arthritis patients need to know” guide.

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