



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **BRAIN TUMOUR SUPPORT NZ**

Wellington, New Zealand

[Embargoed until 21 November 2019, 1:00pm NZDT]

#### CALL FOR FUNDING OF BRAIN CANCER DRUG AVASTIN

Brain tumour patients and carers joined health advocates from Patient Voice Aotearoa on the steps of Parliament today [21 November] to present a petition for government funding of the brain cancer drug Avastin. Brain Tumour Support NZ trustee, Chris Tse, presented the petition on behalf of Sel Leigh of the Tahu Hikuroa Foundation and the New Zealand brain tumour community.

“Survival rates for glioblastoma [a type of brain cancer] have barely improved in the last 30 years and treatment options are severely limited,” Chris Tse says.

“Avastin has been shown to prolong progression-free survival and improve quality of life in patients with advanced brain cancer. It was approved by the United States FDA to treat brain tumours in May 2009<sup>1</sup> – over 10 years ago – and has since been approved in over 70 countries around the world.”

In Australia, Avastin is listed on the PBS<sup>2</sup> [Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme] giving Australian brain tumour patients affordable access to the drug. On the other hand, New Zealand brain tumour patients are having to crowdfund to pay for Avastin.

“If you go to the crowdfunding website Givealittle and type “Avastin” in the search box, you will find that over 40 listings come out, many of them to do with brain cancer. New Zealand is falling behind the rest of the developed world when it comes to funding of cancer medicines. It’s just not right,” says Tse.

Mandy Bathan, chair of Brain Tumour Support NZ, added: “Avastin is an important tool in the toolbox for neuro-oncologists treating patients with advanced brain cancer. It is not a cure, but research shows it can keep patients disease-free for longer, can reduce symptoms and decreases the amount of steroids needed. This results in meaningful benefits to patients – they can maintain their independence, some can continue working and there is less burden on the hospital system.”

Brain Tumour Support NZ was set up to address the severe lack of support and information available to people diagnosed with a brain tumour in New Zealand. The lack of effective treatment options is one critical area of unmet need.

“Being a less common cancer, brain tumours are often overlooked by the medical and research community, and there is a lack of awareness among the general public. Yet most people would be surprised to learn that brain tumours kill more children than any other disease and more young people under the age of 40 than any other cancer,” Mandy says.

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#### ABOUT BRAIN TUMOUR SUPPORT NZ

Brain Tumour Support NZ is a registered charity formed in 2019 to provide much needed support, information and advocacy to brain tumour patients in New Zealand. Our Vision is that everyone living with a brain tumour has the support, information and access to best treatments, so they feel less afraid, less alone and more empowered. Website: [www.braintumoursupport.org.nz](http://www.braintumoursupport.org.nz)

Media Contacts:

Brain Tumour Support NZ

Mandy Bathan – Chair (021-0731294, [mandy@braintumoursupport.org.nz](mailto:mandy@braintumoursupport.org.nz))

Chris Tse – Trustee (027-2712004, [chris@braintumoursupport.org.nz](mailto:chris@braintumoursupport.org.nz))

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda\\_docs/appletter/2009/125085s0169ltr.pdf](https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda_docs/appletter/2009/125085s0169ltr.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pbs.gov.au/medicine/item/11727f>