August 2024

**Insights from the Expert Roundtable on Eczema (Atopic Dermatitis)**

**Introduction:**

On 25 June 2024, the Eczema Association of New Zealand (EANZ) and AbbVie hosted the Expert Roundtable on Eczema (Atopic Dermatitis) in Wellington. This event brought together patient advocates, clinicians, pharmaceutical, Government and public health experts to discuss barriers and inequities that people living with eczema face when accessing care and treatment, and to provide recommendations on ways to resolve them. It sought to review eczema evidence and develop actionable solutions for better care and support for eczema patients.

**Recommendations for Change:**

The Participants developed a set of recommendations for consideration to address barriers and improve eczema care in New Zealand:

1. Expand Specialist Access: Establish multidisciplinary eczema clinics and centres of excellence led by dermatologists. Increase the number of trained dermatologists and support roles like GPs with a specialist interest (GPSIs) in dermatology.
2. Enhance Primary Care Education: Develop comprehensive education packages for primary care to improve understanding and management of eczema. Integrate mental health services with eczema care to provide holistic support for patients.
3. Improve Access to Advanced Therapies: Advocate for increased funding for dermatology services and the inclusion of advanced therapies in Pharmac’s funded treatments for eczema. Ensure equitable access to these treatments across all regions.
4. Raise Public Awareness: Launch public awareness campaigns to educate the community about the burden of eczema. Highlight personal stories and the hidden impacts of the disease including mental health to foster empathy and support.
5. Strengthen Collaboration and Advocacy: Promote unified messaging and stronger collaboration among clinicians, patient groups, medical associations, and policymakers. Advocate for policy changes that prioritise eczema care and funding.

**The Evidence:**

The MEASURE-AD global study revealed the significant burden of eczema in New Zealand and Australia. It found that many patients experience severe symptoms and poor quality of life, with poor control under current therapies. Over 50% of patients reported severe itching, and 33% stated that their skin condition prevented them from working or studying in the past week. Additionally, 63% of patients reported disturbed sleep due to eczema. The study’s authors also noted that the burden of disease was higher in Australia/New Zealand than in other regions in the study, while use of systemic therapies was lower. This disparity underscores the need for access to advanced treatments, which are yet to be funded in New Zealand.1

A new survey[[1]](#footnote-2) of 517 New Zealand adults with eczema and 98 parents and carers revealed people with eczema struggle with life restricting physical and mental impacts and face a constant search to find relief from symptoms. The survey revealed that 51% of adults reported eczema has a moderate-to-significant negative impact on their daily lives. Nearly all respondents (97%) cited negative mental health effects, with 46% experiencing significant or very significant impacts. Common challenges included low self-esteem (79%), stress (68%), and anxiety (59%). Of those surveyed, 70% reported their or their loved one’s eczema is not fully manageable or under control, with many feeling a sense of hopelessness due to not being on top of the condition despite the number of treatments tried.2

An in-depth review of the patient journey provided further insights into the challenges faced by those with eczema. Eczema is often described as "the itch that rashes," indicating that the itching is often more distressing than the visible rash. Diagnosis and treatment can be complex with patients broadly managed in primary care. Effective management often requires specialised treatments and expertise that are not always available in primary care settings. Secondary care management involves optimized topical therapy, phototherapy and long-term systemic treatments however New Zealand has limited access to new systemic eczema treatments.3 Access to care challenges also exist in secondary care with the small number of dermatologists in New Zealand leading to long wait times for patients.,. Additionally, medical dermatology has been impacted by increasing presentations of skin cancer, there are limited public dermatology services, and high cost associated with private services.

**Barriers to Effective Eczema Care:**

Several critical barriers to effective eczema care were identified:

1. Access to Specialists: A severe shortage of dermatologists, especially outside major urban centres, limits patients' access to specialised care. Public dermatology services are insufficient. Patients face long wait times for public dermatology services, and the cost of private care is a barrier for many..
2. Primary Care Challenges: Primary care providers may lack the necessary knowledge and training in managing moderate to severe eczema, leading to suboptimal treatment. Short consultation times and a lack of continuity further exacerbate the problem.
3. Mental Health Support: Eczema's impact on mental health is profound yet support for patients and caregivers is lacking. Stress, anxiety, and depression associated with eczema are often overlooked in the current care model.
4. Advanced Therapies and Treatments: New Zealand NZ lags behind in funded access to advanced treatments which have been shown to be effective treatment options for moderate to severe atopic dermatitis.
5. Public Awareness: There is a lack of public awareness about the burden of eczema, which hinders support and understanding for those affected.

**References**

**1.**Rademaker, M., Jarrett, P., Murrell, D. F., Sinclair, R. D., Pasfield, L., Poppelwell, D., & Shumack, S. (2024). Cross-sectional burden-of-illness study in atopic dermatitis (MEASURE-AD) in Australia and New Zealand reveals impacts on well-being. The Australasian journal of dermatology. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajd.14308> **2.** Eczema Association of New Zealand and AbbVie. Living with eczema: the real-life impact of eczema on New Zealanders. June 2024 [insert link] **3.** Pharmacology and Therapeutics Advisory Committee (PTAC). Record of the Pharmacology and Therapeutics Advisory Committee Meeting. 18 & 19 November 2021, <https://pharmac.govt.nz/assets/2021-11-PTAC-meeting-record.pdf>

1. *The survey was commissioned by the Eczema Association of New Zealand and AbbVie.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)