



Julie Holroyde
Hill and Knowlton
Tel: 416-413-4625
Mobile: (416) 805-7942
julie.holroyde@hillandknowlton.ca

Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc.
385 Bouchard Boulevard
Dorval, Quebec H9S 1A9
<http://www.novartis.ca>

Sabrina Tremblay
Manager, Communications
Tel 514-633-7880 ext. 2254
Mobile 514-880-9766
sabrina.tremblay@novartis.com

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Good news in fight against leading cause of age-related vision loss

Ontario government reimburses first ever medication to improve vision and restore quality of life

Dorval, Quebec (March 13, 2008) – Ontario patients with the leading cause of age-related vision loss, neovascular (wet) age-related macular degeneration (AMD), received a dose of good news today with the government’s decision to reimburse the innovative treatment Lucentis* (ranibizumab). The decision gives real hope for vision improvement for these patients for whom the diagnosis of wet AMD could previously have meant severe central vision loss and possibly even blindness in a matter of weeks to months.

The accelerated review of the Lucentis* file in Ontario under the province’s new Rapid Review process and decision to reimburse it is testament to the significant clinical benefits of this treatment, demonstrates successful collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and underlines the merits of the process. The Ontario Government decision to ensure public reimbursement for this rapidly progressing disease often leading to blindness, demonstrates the government’s rapid engagement and responsiveness to ensure Ontario citizens with wet AMD optimal vision health outcomes.

Lucentis* is the first and only approved treatment clinically proven to offer wet AMD patients significant vision gains. Designed specifically for use in the eye and administered by injection into the eye, Lucentis* helps to stabilize or improve patients’ vision loss which, in turn, can increase their independence and ability to perform activities requiring central vision such as seeing faces, reading and driving.

Now, Ontario joins Quebec as the only provinces in which Lucentis* is reimbursed on their public drug plan. Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. will continue to work with officials in other provinces to ensure all patients with wet AMD will have access to Lucentis* through provincial drug plans, giving all Canadians with this disease the opportunity to prevent blindness or improve their vision.

“The clinical trial results with Lucentis* are the most impressive we have ever seen in wet AMD. Data from pivotal trials have shown that while on therapy more than 90% of patients maintain their vision on Lucentis* and, even more impressive, is that 40% actually had significant improvement in vision”, said Dr. David Wong, Associate Professor in the Department of Ophthalmology and Vision Sciences, University of Toronto and a Staff Retinal Surgeon at St Michael’s Hospital, Toronto. “This marks a major advance in our ability to treat patients with wet AMD in Ontario.”

Lucentis* sets a new treatment standard for people suffering from the wet form of AMD. While earlier therapies have been able to slow the progression of vision loss, Lucentis* offers patients – for the first time – a real opportunity for statistically and clinically significant visual improvement with a proven

therapy. In clinical trials, up to 40% of Lucentis*-treated patients achieved visual acuity of 20/40 or better, which is greater than the level of vision required to drive.

Dr. Wong says that Ontario wet AMD patients should speak to their treating physicians to find out if they are eligible to receive Lucentis* under this new program.

“We congratulate the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care on taking this important step to help reduce the rapid and severe vision loss associated with this disease,” said David Meek, President, Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. “We continue to work with officials in each province to ensure all wet AMD patients who can benefit from Lucentis* receive access to this important treatment as soon as possible, before the disease has progressed and has a major impact on their vision.”

About AMD

More than 290,000 Canadians suffer from wet AMD. It is anticipated that 30,000 new cases of wet AMD will be diagnosed in Canada this year alone, a number expected to double within the next 25 years. Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a degenerative eye disease that affects the macula – the central part of the retina at the back of the eye that is responsible for the “straight ahead” vision necessary for identifying faces and everyday activities like reading, driving and telling time. There are two types of AMD: wet and dry. Neovascular or wet AMD is a fast, progressive disease that, without treatment, leads to severe vision loss and can severely compromise a person’s ability to function independently. While the dry form is more common, wet AMD accounts for 90% of vision loss associated with the disease.

About Lucentis*

Lucentis* is recommended to be administered by intravitreal injection once a month. Treatment may be reduced to one injection every 3 months after the first three injections if monthly dosing is not feasible. Compared to monthly dosing, dosing every 3 months will lead to an approximate 5-letter (1 line) loss of visual acuity benefit, on average, over the following 9 months. Patients should be evaluated regularly.

Of the close to 1,500 patients who were followed through clinical trials, most reported side effects were mild to moderate and generally reversible. Serious ocular adverse events related to the injection procedure are rare. They could include inflammation of the interior of the eye, tear or detachment of the retina or traumatic cataract. In the MARINA trial, the rate of inflammation of the interior of the eye (endophthalmitis), one of the more serious potential adverse events with Lucentis* administration, was 0.05%, or 5 cases out of 10,443 total injections.

Lucentis* was developed by Genentech and Novartis. Genentech has the commercial rights to Lucentis* in the United States, while Novartis has exclusive rights in the rest of the world.

Forward-Looking Statement

The foregoing release contains forward-looking statements that can be identified by terminology such as “innovative”, “the first and only”, “significant”, or similar expressions, or by express or implied discussions regarding potential additional marketing approvals or future sales of Lucentis*. Such forward-looking statements involve known and unknown risks, uncertainties and other factors that may cause actual results with Lucentis* to be materially different from any future results, performance or achievements expressed or implied by such statements. There can be no guarantee that Lucentis* will receive any additional marketing approvals in any other countries, or that it will reach any particular sales levels. In particular, management's expectations regarding commercialization of Lucentis* could be affected by, among other things, additional analysis of Lucentis* clinical data, new clinical data, unexpected clinical trial results, unexpected regulatory actions or delays or government regulation generally, the company's ability to obtain or maintain patent or other proprietary intellectual property

protection, competition in general, increased government, industry, and general public pricing pressures, and other risks and factors referred to in the Company's current Form 20-F on file with the US Securities and Exchange Commission. Should one or more of these risks or uncertainties materialize, or should underlying assumptions prove incorrect, actual results may vary materially from those anticipated, believed, estimated or expected. Novartis is providing the information in this press release as of this date and does not undertake any obligation to update any forward-looking statements contained in this press release as a result of new information, future events or otherwise.

About Novartis Canada

Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc., a leader in the healthcare field, is committed to the discovery, development and marketing of innovative products to improve the well-being of all Canadians. Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. conducts hundreds of clinical trials across the country seeking new treatments for cardiovascular disease, oncology, diabetes, cancer, ophthalmology and organ transplantation. In 2007, the Company invested closed to \$86 million in research and development. Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. employs more than 800 people in Canada and its headquarters are located in Dorval, Québec. In addition to Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc., the Novartis Group in Canada consists of Novartis Animal Health Canada Inc., Novartis Consumer Health Canada Inc., CIBA Vision Canada Inc. and Sandoz Canada Inc. For further information about Novartis Canada, please consult www.novartis.ca.

About Novartis

Novartis AG provides healthcare solutions that address the evolving needs of patients and societies. Focused solely on growth areas in healthcare, Novartis offers a diversified portfolio to best meet these needs: innovative medicines, cost-saving generic pharmaceuticals, preventive vaccines and diagnostic tools, and consumer health products. Novartis is the only company with leading positions in these areas. In 2007, the Group's continuing operations (excluding divestments in 2007) achieved net sales of USD 38.1 billion and net income of USD 6.5 billion. Approximately USD 6.4 billion was invested in R&D activities throughout the Group. Headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, Novartis Group companies employ approximately 98,200 full-time associates and operate in over 140 countries around the world. For more information, please visit www.novartis.com.

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For more information, please contact:

Julie Holroyde Hill and Knowlton Tel: 416-413-4625 Mobile: 416-805-7942 julie.holroyde@hillandknowlton.ca	Sabrina Tremblay Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. Tel: 514-633-7880 ext. 2254 Mobile: 514-880-9766 sabrina.tremblay@novartis.com
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