

# NCPE Assessment

## Plain English Summary

August, 2025

**Drug name:** pembrolizumab  
(pronounced pem-broh-LIH-zoo-mab) in combination with fluoropyrimidine and platinum-containing chemotherapy, for the first-line treatment of locally advanced, unresectable or metastatic human epidermal growth factor receptor 2 (HER2)-negative gastric or gastro-oesophageal junction adenocarcinoma in adults whose tumours express programmed death-ligand 1 (PD-L1) with a combined positive score (CPS)  $\geq 1$

**Brand name:** Keytruda<sup>®</sup>

**HTA ID:** 23070

## What is the NCPE?

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The National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE) is a team of experts who look at the health benefits and costs of medicines. The HSE asks us to advise on whether or not a new medicine is good value for money. We give unbiased advice to help the HSE provide the most effective, safe and cost-effective (value for money) treatments for patients.

## How do we make our recommendations?

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Our main focus is on the health benefits and cost effectiveness of a medicine. We look at the wider costs and health benefits associated with a new medicine, for example:

- Does the new medicine work better than other treatments available in Ireland?
- Is the new medicine easier to give or easier to take compared with other treatments available in Ireland?
- Does the new medicine reduce the need for patients to be hospitalised?
- Does the new medicine improve the quality of a patient's life over other treatments available in Ireland?
- Will the new medicine save resources elsewhere within the health system?

We review the information from clinical trials along with the cost and value for money data presented by the pharmaceutical company. We ask doctors and other healthcare professionals for advice about any health benefits of the new medicine compared with current treatments. We also ask patient organisations to send us their views on how the new drug may improve patients' day-to-day experience of living with a disease.

## What is pembrolizumab used for?

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Pembrolizumab is a cancer medicine used to treat many different types of cancer. In this submission we are considering the use of pembrolizumab in adult patients with gastric (stomach) and gastro-oesophageal junction (junction between the oesophagus and the stomach) adenocarcinoma. Specifically, it is where these cancers are advanced, have spread or returned or cannot be removed by surgery. Also, where the tumours cells have none (or a small amount) of a protein called HER2 on their surface and the tumours do produce certain

levels of a protein known as PD-L1. For this indication, pembrolizumab is used in combination with other cancer medicines.

## **What recommendation has the NCPE made to the HSE?**

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We have recommended that the HSE should consider not funding pembrolizumab unless its cost effectiveness (value for money) can be improved. The HSE will consider our recommendation and make the final decision about reimbursement (funding). When making the funding decision, the HSE will also consider the additional [criteria](#) outlined in the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

## **Why did we make this recommendation?**

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After reviewing the data presented by the pharmaceutical company, we have recommended that the HSE should consider not funding pembrolizumab unless the HSE can agree a suitable price reduction with the pharmaceutical company. This is because we believe the medicine may work as well or better than other ways to manage this condition. However, the price is too high compared with other ways to manage this condition and we believe that the medicine is very poor value for money.

## **Next steps**

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When the HSE receives our recommendation, it will look at all the relevant data about pembrolizumab. The HSE makes the final decision on reimbursement.

## **Where can I get more information?**

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You can get more information about pembrolizumab from the following online options:

- the NCPE Technical Summary Document
- Keytruda® European Public Assessment Report (EPAR) – [Medicines Overview](#), or
- searching for pembrolizumab on our website ([www.ncpe.ie](http://www.ncpe.ie));
- searching for pembrolizumab on the European Medicines Agency (EMA) website ([www.ema.europa.eu](http://www.ema.europa.eu)).

Please refer to the NCPE website for updated information on the reimbursement status of this medicine.