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Free vaccine to benefit some seniors at risk of shingles

A vaccine for the debilitating shingles virus is now available free of charge for people aged 70 to 79 years.

The Zostavax vaccine, which normally costs around \$250, is provided under the National Immunisation Program (NIP) from 1 November 2016 to older people who are often most at risk of contracting the painful rash associated with shingles, or herpes zoster virus.

National Seniors Australia chief executive officer Dagmar Parsons said the vast majority of older people were aware of the shingles virus but had not received the recommended vaccination because of a lack of financial support.

"Paying around \$250 for a vaccination has put it out of reach for many older people on limited, fixed incomes," Ms Parsons said.

"But our research has shown that 90 per cent of older people would undergo the vaccination if it was government-funded."

Ms Parsons said around half of those who had shingles believed it affected their social life and daily household chores, while one-third said it affected their ability to work.

Nine per cent of sufferers were affected for six months or more, including nearly one fifth of those aged 70 years and over.

"Older generations make a significant contribution to Australia's economy, society and family life, and this contribution is adversely affected by preventable illness," Ms Parsons said.

"Making this vaccine available free to people aged 70 to 79 years is a proactive move that will help them enjoy longer lives, free of illness and discomfort."

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With around 200,000 members, National Seniors is Australia's consumer lobby for the over-50s. It is the fourth largest organisation of its type in the world. In 2016 we turn 40.