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Australian trial reveals new drug slows



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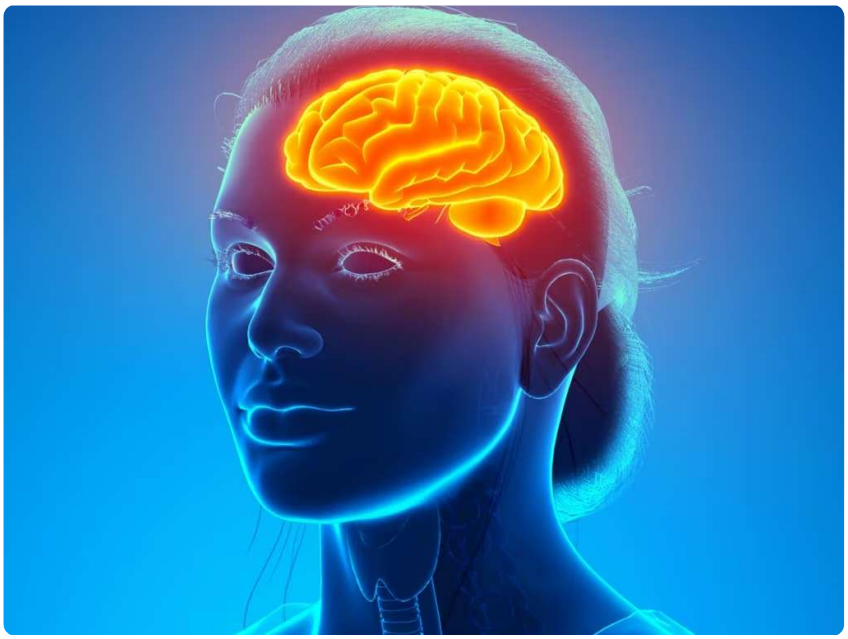
Australian biotech company Actinogen released the results of their phase 2b/3 trials of the drug Emestedastat, which works by blocking the production of the stress hormone cortisol in key areas of the brain, on Thursday.

Developed under the brand name Xanamem, the trial involved 247 patients in Australia and the US with mild to moderate disease, taking a daily pill over a 36-week course of treatment.

While it showed it slowed the progression of the disease by 30 per cent in those over the median age of 75 – representing half the trial group – it did not record a statistically significant benefit in the overall trial group.

According to Actinogen, most participants in the trial experienced few side effects during the 36 weeks.



A drug aimed at reducing Alzheimer's symptoms in patients has shown promising results in older Australians. Sources: iStock / Frank Ling

Actinogen chief executive Steven Gourlay said a recent $10.8m research and development tax incentive rebate awarded by the federal government put them in a stronger cash position amid the trial.

"It encourages companies like us to do as much research in Australia as we can," Dr Gourlay said.

"So it's been good for Australian jobs, it's been good for Australian science, and it's been great for helping companies like us to do the work that we need to do to answer important questions like, 'Does this drug that controls cortisol work in Alzheimer's disease?'," he said.

The next trial is expected to involve 700 patients and would begin in mid-2027, with the company hoping to get the drug to market in 2030.

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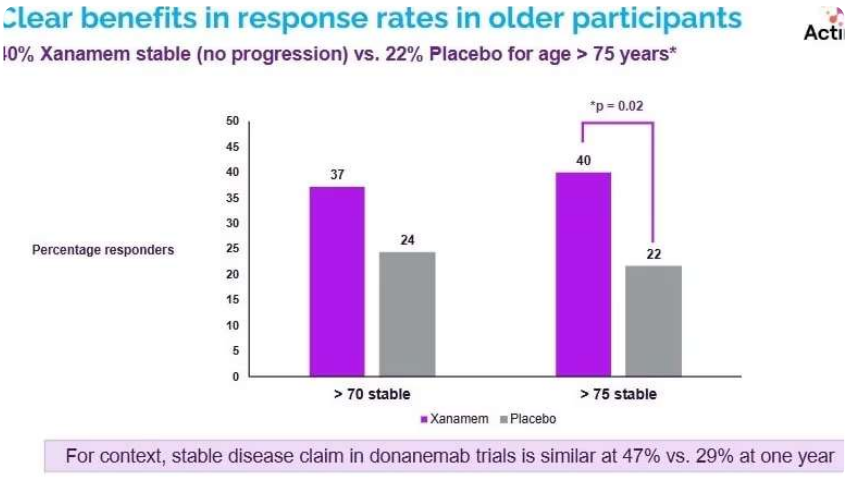
Dr Gourlay said if that trial proved successful, he would hope they would be in a position to mass produce the drug, pending approval by the Theraputic Goods Administration (TGA).

He said he would also welcome it being listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme following further trials and pricing assessments



Participants over the age of 75 recorded no progression when taking Xanamem, compared with 22 per cent who took a placebo. Picture: Supplied

"We would obviously be developing a lot of economic data to show the PBS when the drug gets approved, as you do in Australia and a lot of European countries – less so in the US – to show that the drug really is creating value: preventing people from going into nursing homes, improving quality of life, reducing system costs," Dr Gourlay said.

"And hopefully that would be convincing, and that would then bring forward the day that PBS would give us an approval."

Dementia – an umbrella term for a raft of neurological conditions of which Alzheimer's is one – is the leading cause of death among all Australians.

According to Dementia Australia, 446,500 Australians are currently living with dementia, with that number expected to increase to more than one million by 2065.



Actinogen chief executive Steven Gourlay said he hoped the drug would pass regulatory assessments and go to market by 2030. Picture: Supplied

News of Xamemen's phase two trial results was released on the same day Dementia Australia released No Time to Lose: A United Call for National Dementia Reform, renewing its call for the federal government to "take decisive action to address one of the nation's greatest health, social and economic challenges".

"The National Dementia Action Plan provides an important foundation, but sustained action and investment are needed to improve outcomes for people living with dementia, their families and carers," Dementia Australia CEO Professor Tanya Buchanan said.

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"Collectively, we are advocating for a national brain health and dementia risk reduction campaign, clear diagnostic pathways, a network of dementia care navigators, reimagining respite so it is more accessible and affordable, and reviewing residential aged care funding to ensure quality dementia care," Prof Buchanan said.

"Together, we call on the Australian Government to work with the sector and people with living experience to act on these priorities through the 2027-28 budget."

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