

HEALTH MINISTER ANNOUNCES PLAN TO HELP MANITOBANS WITH HIGH DRUG COSTS

New Program Allows Pharmacare Drug Deductibles to be Paid in Monthly Instalments

Another step in the improvement of Manitoba's Pharmacare program was taken recently with a new initiative that will give Manitobans with high drug costs relative to their income the option to pay their Pharmacare deductible in monthly instalments.

"The rising costs of prescription drugs continue to present challenges to government and to individual Manitobans," said Tim Sale, Minister of Health. "This income-based program is designed to help those with high drug bills finance their share of prescription drug costs more manageably."

"Many people affected by multiple sclerosis face high drug costs. The ability to pay the deductible over 12 months will ease their financial burden," said Norm Velnes, president of the Manitoba Division of the MS Society of Canada. "We congratulate Manitoba Health for finding a creative solution to this problem. It is a positive step in easing the high drug costs faced by many people."

To participate in the program, beneficiaries must have a monthly drug expense that equals or exceeds 25 per cent of their monthly income. It is not assessed by age, disease or on which member of a family requires medication. It is estimated that 19,000 Pharmacare beneficiaries are eligible to participate in the monthly deductible instalment program.

The Manitoba Society of Pharmacists will administer the new program. "Pharmacists want their patients to have access to the medications they need to maintain and improve their health," said Brent Havelange, president of the Manitoba Society of Pharmacists (MSP). "MSP is pleased to be involved in this important initiative to ensure that Manitobans gain access to these medications in a timely manner."

Sale also announced that people using this new program will be able to pay their monthly deductible through Manitoba Hydro's bill payment system. "We are pleased to be able to assist in making this monthly payment of the Pharmacare deductible possible, utilizing our existing billing system and reaching virtually all Manitobans who might make use of this option," said Bob Brennan, president and CEO of Manitoba Hydro.

Sale said prescription drugs are an integral part of delivering effective health care and providing a high quality of life for Manitobans. The province's Pharmacare program ensures Manitobans can afford this important health-care service.

According to the Canadian Institute of Health Information in 2005, 50.9 percent of prescribed drugs in Manitoba were covered publicly, the greatest percentage of any province in Canada.

Manitoba's Pharmacare covers 100 per cent of drug costs once the income-based deductible is reached. Manitoba and the Yukon are the only two jurisdictions with a deductible structure as the sole cost-sharing requirement. All other jurisdictions mandate co-payments in conjunction with deductibles and/or premiums.

"The government is committed to improving Pharmacare. Since 1999, over 1,500 drugs have been added to the approved Pharmacare list and the number of families benefiting from the program has increased by 31,000," said Sale. "However, drug costs are the single fastest-growing expense in our health-care system and we need a national pharmaceuticals strategy to help all provinces cope with these escalating costs." The new system is expected to be in place in the fall of 2006.