

## Nova Scotia Seniors' Pharmacare Program Changes to the Program Effective April 1, 2004

The Department of Health announced changes to the Seniors' Pharmacare Program effective April 1, 2004. The Nova Scotia government is investing an additional \$12 million in the Program. This additional funding will allow Nova Scotia to continue to have the most comprehensive drug plan for seniors in Atlantic Canada.

The following questions and answers will help explain the changes. For more information, please call the toll-free number 1-800-544-6191.

### **What changes have been made to the Nova Scotia Seniors' Pharmacare Program?**

Effective April 1, 2004, the annual premium will increase from \$336 to \$390 per senior (\$32.50 each month). However, more than half of the seniors enrolled in the Seniors' Pharmacare Program will see no increase in the cost of their drug coverage for the coming year.

Single seniors with an income of \$18,000 or below and married seniors with a combined income of \$21,000 or below will not pay any premium. Previously, the income levels for paying no premiums were \$17,000 for single seniors and \$20,000 for married seniors.

The late-entry premium penalty for seniors who do not join the Program when they become eligible will be limited to five (5) years. Previously, seniors who joined the Program late had to pay the higher premium for as long as they were in the Program.

Seniors will continue to:

- pay no premium if they receive the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) from the federal government
- pay a co-pay of 33% of the total prescription cost to a maximum of \$30 for each prescription with an annual maximum of \$350 (this prescription cost is paid by seniors directly to their pharmacies when they have their prescription filled)
- receive premium reductions if they:
  - are single, and their income is less than \$24,000 a year; or
  - are married, and their combined income adds up to less than \$28,000 a year

429-6565 or 1-800-544-6191



- access drug coverage available to them through their private plan, Veterans Affairs Canada, or First Nations and Inuit Health.

## **Why is the premium increasing?**

Over the years, Pharmacare costs have grown significantly. For 2003/04, total Program costs are projected to be \$134.6 million with government projected to pay 73.9% and seniors to pay 26.1% of this total. Total Program costs for 2004/05 are projected to be \$146.8 million (9% increase).

## **How do seniors apply for premium exemptions or reductions?**

Seniors can call Pharmacare at 1-800-544-6191 or in the metro area at 429-6565 and request an Application for Reduced Premium.

## **Do other provinces charge seniors for their drug programs?**

In all provinces, seniors pay a portion of their drug costs under the provincial drug programs. The senior's costs may be in the form of a premium, deductible, or co-payment or a combination of these.

In some provinces only those seniors who receive the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) from the federal government are eligible to join the provincial drug program. Nova Scotia's program provides coverage to all seniors who qualify, regardless of their income.

## **How are seniors being informed of this change?**

Seniors who are members of Seniors' Pharmacare Program will receive their annual enrollment packages during the week of March 7, 2004. Notification will also be sent to the Senior Citizens' Secretariat and Nova Scotia pharmacies.

## **Who was consulted on the changes to the Seniors' Pharmacare Program?**

Pharmacare staff have been meeting with the Group of IX Seniors' Organizations through the Nova Scotia Senior Citizens' Secretariat on an ongoing basis to discuss the long-term viability of the Program. The primary role of the Group of IX Seniors' Organizations is to strengthen the voice and presence of seniors in government decision-making.

In its advice to the Minister of Health, the Group of IX recommended that if the government decided that seniors must contribute more to the Program, it should consider changing the annual premium instead of the co-payments, because the co-payment affects all seniors, even those on low incomes. The government accepted that advice and also agreed to exempt more seniors from paying premiums, and to limit the late-entry premium penalty to five (5) years.

## **Are seniors who have other drug coverage eligible to join the Seniors' Pharmacare Program?**

Seniors with drug coverage through Veterans Affairs Canada, First Nations and Inuit Health, or a private plan are not eligible to join the Seniors' Pharmacare Program. If a senior's drug co-payments through their private plan add up to more than it would have cost to join Pharmacare, they will be reimbursed the additional amount; provided the drugs are Pharmacare benefits. People can contact Pharmacare for more information on this matter.

## **What is being done to address rising costs?**

Pharmacare has introduced many system and policy changes to control rising drug costs. The government also supports a number of activities that play an important role in managing Program costs.

The Formulary Management Committee, a committee of experts, carefully reviews all evidence to ensure that the drugs paid for by Pharmacare are effective and affordable.

The Drug Evaluation Alliance of Nova Scotia (DEANS) works with doctors, Dalhousie Continuing Education, and pharmacists to look at ways to improve drug therapy for Nova Scotians. For example, Nova Scotia offers a province-wide academic detailing service. This service provides doctors with unbiased information on the most effective and appropriate use of drugs.

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## **For more information**

### **Nova Scotia Seniors' Pharmacare Program**

For specific information on the Seniors' Pharmacare Program call 1-800-544-6191, or in the metro area, 429-6565, or visit the Pharmacare website at [www.gov.ns.ca/health/pharmacare](http://www.gov.ns.ca/health/pharmacare)

### **Senior Citizens' Secretariat**

The Nova Scotia Senior Citizens' Secretariat operates a toll-free information line for seniors and persons acting on their behalf. For information and assistance, call 1-800-670-0065 or, in the metro area, 424-0065.