
MANITOBA GOVERNMENT NEWS RELEASE

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April 23, 2004

MINISTER OUTLINES PLAN
TO SAFEGUARD PHARMACARE'S FUTURE

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Measures Include Bulk Buying,
Using More Lower Cost Generic Drugs

Health Minister Dave Chomiak today announced a plan to safeguard the future of Manitoba's Pharmacare program.

The plan, Pharmacare: A Program for Today and Tomorrow, outlines a series of measures to control spiralling costs in Manitoba's Pharmacare program while preserving benefits for patients.

"The Manitoba government is committed to Pharmacare. Over the past five years, we have added 1,000 new drugs and provided benefits to an additional 30,000 families," said Chomiak. "But drug costs are the single fastest growing expense in our health care system. Without action, Pharmacare's budget will reach \$1 billion within a decade. That's simply not sustainable."

Chomiak highlighted two key strategies in the plan to contain rising drug costs: improved use of cheaper generic drugs and a Maximum Allowable Cost policy.

Generic drugs are cheaper than brand name drugs but usually have the same active ingredients. Using lower cost generic drugs makes sense for Manitoba, the minister said.

Pharmacare will:

- * accelerate the approval of new generic drugs for Pharmacare coverage; and
- * pursue a generic drug price tendering system to harness savings from Pharmacare's bulk buying power.

There are often large price differences within groups of drugs that treat the same condition. Other provinces have saved resources for Pharmacare by changing drug coverage to reimburse only for the price of the lowest cost drug that has proven to be effective in treating a condition. This policy, known as Maximum Allowable Cost in Nova Scotia, preserves the ability of patients and their doctors to choose their medication. Manitoba's Pharmacare program will adopt a Maximum Allowable Cost policy for certain classes of drugs as determined by an expert advisory committee.

"We need to use Pharmacare's bulk buying power to ensure we pay the best possible prices for needed medicines," Chomiak said. "And we must learn from other provinces that have found innovative ways to control spiralling drug costs while preserving drug coverage for patients."

Chomiak said the province will continue to pursue a national solution to rising drug costs from the federal government, but must now implement its own strategies to put the province's drug program on a stable footing for the future. He noted the prime minister's recent comments in support of a national pharmaceuticals strategy.

Pharmacare: A Program for Today and Tomorrow is available at:
<http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/pharmacare/strategy.html>