5. Pharmaceutical Benefits

Vision

Yukoners have affordable access to prescription drugs, with minimal out-of-pocket expenses.

Why pharmaceutical benefits are important

Medicines are a critical part of health care. They help us to prevent and fight disease, breathe better, manage chronic illness, and ease pain. And yet Canada is the only country in the world with universal health care that does not provide universal coverage for prescription drugs. Instead, we rely on a patchwork of government-run drug insurance programs and private drug insurance plans that are different in each province and territory.¹

There are a number of public drug coverage programs in Yukon. Despite this, some people remain uninsured or under-insured. Even basic prescription costs can add up when you are paying out-of-pocket.

How our system works now

Yukon’s current publicly funded drug programs provide coverage to different groups and are delivered across multiple branches, departments and systems. This creates inefficiencies, gaps in coverage for some residents, more expensive drug costs and confusion for providers and patients about what is covered by each program.

Insured Health Services Drug Programs

Insured Health Services offers three different programs that cover the costs of generic prescription drugs. Each program covers a different group:

- **Pharmacare and Extended Health Benefits Program:** Yukon residents aged 65 and older, and their spouses, aged 60 and older.

- **Chronic Disease and Disability Benefits Program:** Yukon residents who have a qualifying chronic disease or a serious functional disability.

- **Children’s Drug and Optical Program:** children under 19 in low-income families.

Social Assistance

For low-income Yukoners that are not eligible for one of Insured Health Services’ programs, social assistance will provide coverage for prescription drugs. Generally, this coverage aligns with the programs offered by Insured Health, but there are some exceptions.

---

Yukon Hospital Corporation Drug Program

When a patient is staying in the hospital, all prescription drug costs are covered. For patients in out-patient chemotherapy, the IV chemotherapy drugs are provided at no cost to the patient, but patients provide all other out-patient medications, either through additional drug plan coverage or privately.

Hospitals across the territory buy prescription drugs as a group. Because of the amount they purchase, they are able to buy drugs at a lower price. Government programs do not have access to this same pricing so drug costs can vary.

Continuing Care Long-Term Care Facilities

Yukon’s long-term care facilities utilize multiple procurement processes with an application process for exceptions when needed.

Possible ways forward for Yukon

Simplifying and streamlining Yukon’s system can help ensure:

• Yukoners have affordable access to prescription drugs.
• Patients and providers understand what is covered and how to access services.
• The system is efficient and cost-effective.

Here are some of the ideas that were suggested to the panel:

• Consider having the Yukon Hospital Corporation purchase and manage all drug supply for the territory’s long-term care homes. This would take advantage of the hospital’s access to lower costs.
• Find ways to align drug costs with other Canadian jurisdictions. Yukon pays a high price for prescription drugs, usually 30 to 48 per cent more than the base drug cost.
• Expand overall program coverage. Consider refocusing the existing drug coverage programs to ensure they are meeting Yukoners’ needs, or creating a universal pharmaceutical benefit program.

As Yukon’s population ages, and drug costs continue to rise, having a strong and cost-effective drug coverage system in place becomes even more important. The government needs to find and implement ways to minimize cost, and ensure Yukoners are able to access the medications they need.
Questions for discussion

1. Should the government consider a universal pharmaceutical program?

2. There are currently five different drug programs in the territory with different levels of coverage; should Yukon combine its different drug plans so that everyone has access to the same benefits?

3. Right now, dispensing fees for medications in the Yukon are much higher than in other parts of the country, even in sparsely populated areas. Should the government negotiate lower dispensing fees so that it can fund prescription drug coverage for more Yukoners?

4. If additional funds were needed to create a territory-wide pharmaceutical program, would you rather move money from other programs that might reduce the care one would receive or would you be willing to pay a flat-rate premium to access the medications you need?

5. What’s the single most important thing that could be done in regards to the delivery of pharmaceutical care in Yukon?