

# Questions and Answers: Updated Income Eligibility Thresholds for the Seniors Co-Payment Program under the Ontario Drug Benefit Program

## **Question 1: What has changed?**

The income eligibility thresholds for the Seniors Co-payment Program (SCP), under the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) Program, are being updated from \$19,300 to \$22,200 (for single seniors) and \$32,300 to \$37,100 (for senior couples) starting on August 1, 2021.

## **Question 2: Why was the change made?**

As part of its comprehensive plan to end hallway health care, Ontario is investing in programs that keep seniors healthy in their communities longer. Our government will continue to support Ontario's seniors with access to quality health care they deserve.

These updates ensure that the Seniors Co-payment Program income eligibility thresholds better reflect cost-of-living increases in Ontario and continue to be in line with increases to income supports for seniors. With the updated thresholds more seniors in Ontario will have access to lower deductibles and co-payments for medications covered under the Ontario Drug Benefit Program.

## **Question 3: Why did it take so long for the government to increase the income threshold for these programs?**

The current income eligibility thresholds were last updated using projected cost of living growth to ensure that they remained fair and relevant for several years. The government is now updating the thresholds of these programs at the beginning of the upcoming benefit year that starts on August 1, 2021, since certain seniors receiving government income supports would no longer be eligible for the Seniors Co-payment Program for drugs as the current thresholds would be below the income support values, which are regularly adjusted for inflation.

## **Question 4: How were the new income eligibility thresholds calculated?**

The Ontario government recognizes that living on a fixed income can create gaps in care, something that many seniors in Ontario face.

The updated thresholds were determined by adjusting for the inflation that has happened in Ontario since the last threshold update in 2016. The thresholds set in 2016 are due to be updated because of the income supports for low-income seniors being regularly adjusted for inflation. This update helps to ensure that the thresholds continue to remain relevant and stay above income support levels for seniors.

**Question 5: What is the difference in drug benefits between seniors who are eligible for the SCP and those who are not?**

All OHIP-insured seniors aged 65 years and over automatically qualify for the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) Program. On the first day of the month after they turn 65 years of age, all OHIP-insured Ontarians are automatically enrolled in the Ontario Drug Benefit program, which covers most of the costs of more than 5,000 prescription drug products. Seniors pay the first \$100 of their prescription drug costs each year (annual deductible) before they are eligible for drug coverage. After the deductible is paid, seniors then pay up to \$6.11 toward the dispensing fee for every prescription (a co-payment). The Seniors Co-payment Program (SCP) under the ODB is an application-based program for seniors with incomes less than certain income eligibility thresholds. Seniors enrolled in the SCP pay no annual deductible and a reduced co-payment of \$2 per each prescription improving access to essential drugs.

**Question 6: How would this change impact seniors financially?**

The changes would ensure that more low-income seniors are eligible for the Seniors Co-Payment Program. Seniors who are enrolled in the program pay no annual deductible and a reduced co-payment. It is estimated that low-income seniors enrolled in the SCP save an average of about \$105-\$120 per year on prescription drug costs compared to seniors who are not.

**Question 7: How can Ontarians apply to the SCP under the new thresholds?**

Eligible seniors are encouraged to apply in advance of the start of the upcoming Benefit Year to ensure they receive the reduction in their drug deductible and co-payment on August 1, 2021. This will ensure that those who are eligible receive the benefit of lower deductibles and co-payments as soon as they are eligible and won't face out of pocket expenses.

Ontarians who are currently 65 years of age or older, or who are turning 65 on or after August 1, 2021, and who meet the new income eligibility thresholds may apply now to the SCP for the reduction in their deductible and co-payment as of August 1, 2021. Complete an application form available [online](#) or request an application over the phone toll free 1-888-405-0405. In the Toronto area, Ontarians may call 416-503-4586. Once an application has been submitted, eligibility is verified based on the income information the ministry retrieves from the Canada Revenue Agency. Seniors whose income cannot be retrieved from the CRA can provide other income documentation to confirm eligibility. 80% of all completed SCP applications are processed within 7 days and 100% are processed within 17 days.

### **Question 8: What happens to seniors who are already enrolled in the SCP?**

Seniors who are already enrolled are not affected by the revised income eligibility thresholds and are not required to take any action. They will continue to receive benefits under the SCP.

### **Question 9: How would this change impact businesses/pharmacies?**

There is no impact to businesses, including pharmacies. Pharmacies would be expected to help communicate the income eligibility threshold changes to seniors as part of their regular business practices.

## **General Q&As Related to the Seniors Co-payment Program (SCP)**

### **Question 1: What is the SCP?**

The SCP under the Ontario Drug Benefit Program provides financial assistance to qualifying seniors by reducing their out-of-pocket drug costs. All OHIP-insured seniors aged 65 years and over automatically qualify for the ODB Program. Seniors pay a \$100 annual deductible before they are eligible for drug coverage. After the deductible is paid, seniors then pay a co-payment of up to \$6.11 toward the dispensing fee per prescription.

Seniors enrolled in the SCP have no annual deductible and a per prescription co-payment of up to \$2. In order to be eligible for the SCP, seniors must apply by submitting an application to the program and must also qualify under the income eligibility thresholds for single seniors and coupled seniors. These income thresholds are currently set out in section 20.2 of Ontario Regulation 201/96 under the *Ontario Drug Benefit Act*.

### **Question 2: What is covered under the ODB program?**

The ODB Program covers **most of the cost of approximately 5,000** prescription drug products. In addition, there are over 1,000 drugs that may be covered by the Exceptional Access Program (EAP) if specific clinical criteria are met. EAP requests are reviewed on a case-by-case basis based on the patient's individual clinical situation and certain criteria specific to each drug.

The ODB Program also helps to pay for:

- [some products used in monitoring and testing for diabetes](#)
- [some prescribed over-the-counter drugs](#) under specific circumstances (for example, Ibuprofen 200mg, Ferrous sulphate 300)
- [some nutrition products](#)
- [some drugs used in the treatment of HIV/AIDS](#)
- [some drugs used in palliative care](#)
- help to quit smoking:

- up to a year of pharmacist-assisted counselling (talk to your pharmacist or health care provider)
- drugs for treatment if you are age 18 years or older

### **Question 3: How many seniors are enrolled in the SCP?**

Through the ODB Program, the government provides drug benefits to over 4 million eligible persons. In FY2019/20, 2.3 million seniors received drug benefits under the ODB program. Of those, 301,000 seniors were registered in the SCP.

### **Question 4: How do seniors learn about the SCP?**

A letter is sent to all Ontarians about three months prior to their 65th birthday to let them know they will **automatically be covered** under the Ontario Drug Benefit Program on the first day of the month after they turn 65 years old. The letter also provides information about the SCP and how to apply.

Information on the SCP is also provided to Ontarians enrolled in social assistance programs who are approaching their 65<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Information regarding the ODB Program and the SCP is also available via pharmacies and pharmacists.

The ministry's webpage on drug coverage in Ontario also provides information on the SCP, at: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/get-help-high-prescription-drug-costs>.

Ontarians can get a copy of the SCP application:

- [online](#)
- by phone
  - [1-888-405-0405](tel:1-888-405-0405) (toll free)
  - [416-503-4586](tel:416-503-4586) (Toronto area)

Mail your completed application, including all required signatures and supporting documents, to:

Ontario Drug Benefit Program  
Ministry of Health  
P.O. Box 384, Station D  
Etobicoke, Ontario M9A 4X3

### **Question 5: Who is eligible for the SCP?**

The SCP is an application-based program, available to Ontarians with a valid Ontario Health Card number, who are 65 years of age or older, whose income is within the income eligibility thresholds:

#### For Benefit Year 2020/21 that ends July 31, 2021

- a single senior, the senior's annual net income must be less than or equal to \$19,300, and
- a senior who has a spouse, their combined annual net income must be less than or equal to \$32,300.

#### For Benefit Year 2021/22 that starts August 1, 2021

- a single senior, the senior's annual net income must be less than or equal to \$22,200, and
- a senior who has a spouse, their combined annual net income must be less than or equal to \$37,100.

### **Question 6: When were the SCP income eligibility thresholds previously updated?**

The SCP income eligibility thresholds were originally established in 1996, with the inception of the SCP program. Prior to these 2021 changes, the SCP income eligibility thresholds were last updated in 2016.

### **Question 7: How does the ministry confirm that an SCP applicant is eligible?**

Applicants for the SCP are income-tested when they apply to the SCP. The majority of applicants are enrolled based on the income information the ministry retrieves from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), as consent for the CRA's disclosure of income tax information to the ministry is mandatory for enrollment.

For those whose income cannot be retrieved from the CRA, they can provide their Notice of Assessment or other income documentation to confirm their eligibility. 80% of all completed SCP applications are processed within 7 days and 100% are processed within 17 days.

SCP applicants who refuse to provide CRA consent, or who withdraw previously granted consent are not eligible for SCP coverage but are eligible to receive drug benefits under the ODB Program as seniors.