

Spain cuts subsidies for more than 450 medicines

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Spain's cash-strapped government is eliminating state subsidies for more than 450 medicines, ranging from cough remedies to the pain-killer codeine.

The step is expected to save 440 million euros (\$548 million), according to the text of a proposal published by Spanish media Wednesday, part of a scheme to find seven billion euros a year in [health savings](#).

[Health Minister](#) Ana Mato is to present the plan to cut subsidies for 456 medicines to the regional governments, which are responsible for health and education.

Patients who want the medicines will have to pay themselves.

Health professionals and [consumer groups](#) warned that the measure may not result in the desired goal.

"Many doctors will write prescriptions to replace them with medicines that will be reimbursed that are indicated for more serious illnesses and generally more expensive," said a statement by consumer association FACUA.

It described the decision as a move towards the "dismantling of public health".

Bernardo Sanchez, a [medical doctor](#) and Andalusian representative of

the Federation of Associations for the Defence of Public Health, said most of the medicines on the list were of doubtful efficacy.

"The problem is that they have put some medicines on the list that are really useful for concrete diseases," such as codeine, an analgesic, and acetylcysteine, which thins [mucus](#).

Sanchez, too, warned that doctors may end up replacing some of the medicines with more expensive alternatives.

The move follows other money-saving initiatives such as patients contributing to the cost of medicines depending on their income as of Sunday, and the closure or privatization of some medical centres in regions such as Catalonia.

From September 1, immigrants without papers will only have the right to use free paediatric, pregnancy and [emergency care](#), a measure designed to save 500 million euros.

Protests against the health cuts have mounted in past months. In the latest action, Madrid health professionals are on a three-day strike until Thursday against a 3.3-percent salary cut by the regional government.

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