

## BC's drug plan deductibles do not lower drug use for some seniors

May 15 2017

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Credit: Susan Buck Ms/Public Domain

Adding a modest 2% income-based deductible for prescription drugs did not appear to deter some seniors from filling prescriptions, found a study

of British Columbia's public drug plan published in *CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal)*.

"This finding differs from the results of other Canadian studies, which showed that increased drug cost-sharing reduced drug use and increased use of other [health services](#) in at-risk groups (e.g., those on social assistance)," writes Dr. Michael Law, Centre for Health Services and Policy Research, University of British Columbia (UBC), with coauthors.

A deductible is the amount a household must pay for prescription drugs before a public drug plan will cover any costs. British Columbia uses income-based deductibles, meaning households must spend a percentage of [household income](#) on drugs before public coverage becomes active.

Researchers looked at the impact of such deductibles in the province's Fair PharmaCare plan on [prescriptions](#) and health care service use among 280 615 seniors. In BC, people born before 1939 with household incomes of less than \$30 000 a year do not pay a deductible, but those born after 1939 and earning between \$15 000 and \$30 000 pay a 2% deductible as well as coinsurance to a maximum of 3% per household.

Within this group, they found that the deductible reduced the number of people who qualified for public subsidy and decreased public drug spending. However, it did not reduce overall prescription drug use, which can lead to health issues from not taking prescribed medications, nor did it increase use of other health services.

"Our study showed that BC's income-based deductibles considerably lowered public spending on [prescription drugs](#) for the group of seniors we studied. However, it did not appear to affect overall access to medicines and use of other health services. While governments must always consider more vulnerable populations when making policy, these results may increase the options available to them when considering

health care financing reforms," Dr. Law suggests.

**More information:** Michael R. Law et al. Impact of income-based deductibles on drug use and health care utilization among older adults, *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2017). [DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.161119](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.161119)

Provided by Canadian Medical Association Journal

Citation: BC's drug plan deductibles do not lower drug use for some seniors (2017, May 15)  
retrieved 27 April 2024 from  
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-05-bc-drug-deductibles-seniors.html>

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