

Pharmacists prescribing for minor ailments will save healthcare dollars, study shows

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Allowing Ontario pharmacists to prescribe for minor ailments could save the province \$42 million a year, according to a new study from researchers at the University of Waterloo.

The study used mathematical modeling to examine the [economic impact](#) of implementing a compensated program for pharmacists prescribing for minor ailments in the [province](#).

Minor ailments are considered health conditions that can typically be self-diagnosed by patients—such as [urinary tract infections](#) and athlete's foot—and can be managed with minimal treatment or straightforward self-care strategies.

"Globally, health-care systems are experiencing an increased demand for services because of the pandemic," said Wasem Alsabbagh, a professor at the School of Pharmacy and lead author of the study. "Now, more than ever, we require financially responsible, efficient approaches to health-care service delivery. Minor ailments prescribing by pharmacists is an example of this."

The researchers developed a model to project how pharmacist minor ailments prescribing will affect Ontario's health-care system. They focused on the impact in three prevalent minor ailments: upper respiratory tract infections (URTI), contact dermatitis (CD) and conjunctivitis.

The study demonstrated that a significant number of patient visits to walk-in clinics, family doctors and emergency departments would be prevented, as patients could receive care at the pharmacy. This reduction would free physicians' time for more complex cases and save the health-care system money by requiring a lower cost than what is currently in place.

"Ontario is in the process of establishing a plan for allowing pharmacists to prescribe for minor ailments," Alsabbagh said. "We wanted to examine the economic impact of a variety of methods for implementing this change to determine which one is most cost-effective for Ontario's health-care system."

Eight provinces across Canada already allow [pharmacist](#) prescribing for minor ailments, and the style of billing varies province to province. The study determined that if Ontario adopts a compensation model and fee similar to Saskatchewan, the province would save, on average, \$12.30, \$4.90 and \$9.30 for URTIs, CD and conjunctivitis, respectively, per patient. This corresponds to a total saving of more than \$42 million annually, an amount that is just a fraction of the province's savings when other [health conditions](#) are considered as well.

These findings provide a unique and important insight for policymakers in Ontario regarding the magnitude of the cost savings and an optimal approach to implementing a compensated program for pharmacists prescribing for minor ailments.

The study was published in the *International Journal of Pharmacy Practice* and featured a cross-discipline research team consisting of pharmacy practice researchers, minor ailments experts and pharmacoeconomists.

More information: John J Kim et al. Economic evaluation of pharmacists prescribing for minor ailments in Ontario, Canada: a cost-minimization analysis, *International Journal of Pharmacy Practice* (2021). [DOI: 10.1093/ijpp/riab006](https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpp/riab006)

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