

Study shows patient support programs for prescription drugs are common, especially for expensive drugs

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About one in 10 prescription drugs—mainly brand-name and expensive drugs and those for rare diseases—has a manufacturer-sponsored patient

support program, which usually includes financial, nursing and educational supports.

"In an era where [policy-makers](#) are grappling with escalating [drug prices](#) and budgetary impacts globally, the pharmaceutical industry promotes patient support programs as adding complementary value to a drug through supporting medication adherence and enhancing clinical outcomes, [patient experience](#) or quality of life," writes Dr. Quinn Grundy, a [registered nurse](#) and assistant professor at the Lawrence Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto, with co-authors.

To understand the range of [prescription drugs](#) with patient support programs, researchers quantified and evaluated patient support programs for drugs on the market as of August 2022. "Prevalence and nature of manufacturer-sponsored patient support programs for prescription drugs in Canada: a cross-sectional study" is [published](#) in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*.

Of the total 2,556 prescription drugs marketed by 89 companies, they identified programs for 256 drugs (10%). Almost two-thirds of companies (55; 62%) offered patient support programs. Although only about 10% of drugs on the market are biologics, they represent more than half of drugs that have a patient support program.

Patient support programs most frequently existed for drugs that are expensive. Of the 2,214 drugs dispensed through retail pharmacies, 1,632 (74%) cost \$10 per unit or less whereas those with a patient support program had a median cost per unit of \$208.40.

The researchers note that they may have underestimated the number of support programs, as their analysis relied on publicly available information and they may have missed patient support programs for very specialized, rare drugs.

While financial supports, nursing support and counseling are valuable to patients, the researchers found duplication of services across companies marketing drugs with the same active ingredients, and lack of transparency around what programs offered and their impacts.

"Whether manufacturer-sponsored patient support programs are the optimal model to provide care related to medicines is an open question. Models of care should be designed around people's health needs, not a particular product," says Dr. Grundy.

More information: Prevalence and nature of manufacturer-sponsored patient support programs for prescription drugs in Canada: a cross-sectional study, *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2023). [DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.230841](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.230841)

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