



Minnesota's RxConnect – Information on affordable prescription medications

Many Minnesotans cannot afford the prescription medications they need. At the direction of Governor Tim Pawlenty, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) developed the first state website, www.MinnesotaRxConnect.com, to help Minnesotans safely purchase low-cost prescription medicine.

Launching Minnesota RxConnect

DHS, with assistance from the Minnesota Department of Administration, launched the Minnesota RxConnect website in January 2004. The website addressed issues surrounding affordable prescription medication and how to order prescription medication through Canadian pharmacies featured on the site.

In selecting the Canadian pharmacies for the website, DHS set forth basic requirements for participation. Pharmacies had to be located in Canada, be licensed in accordance with Canadian laws, be willing to guarantee affordable prices and be willing to allow Minnesota officials to visit their facilities. State officials visited each of the pharmacies to review the licensing requirements, safety protocols, logistics for filling orders and competitiveness of prices. Details about the pharmacy screening criteria are available on the website.

In June 2005, Minnesota RxConnect expanded by allowing two participating Canadian pharmacies to tap existing relationships with pharmacies in the United Kingdom to fill orders for Minnesota customers. This option was later removed because of Canadian federal policy changes.

On Jan. 1, 2009, the Canadian-based Total Care Pharmacy (TCP) is no longer participating in Minnesota RxConnect. This is because the state and TCP chose not to renew the pharmacy contract that expired on Dec. 31, 2008. Three other Canadian pharmacies continued their participation on the site.

An option for state employees to access prescription medications from Canada with no out-of-pocket cost also ended due to non-renewal of TCP's contract.

Adding a price comparison tool

Because not all medications are cheaper in Canada and prices often vary among pharmacies, a local price comparison tool, Minnesota RxPrice Compare, was added to the website in June 2006. The web tool allows Minnesotans to compare local pharmacy prices for about 400 brand, generic and therapeutic alternative medications. The prices are available to all consumers, with or without prescription medication coverage. Consumers may search by county, city or ZIP code to find medication prices. Minnesota pharmacies and those in communities bordering the state are included.

The prices listed are from the most recent claim submitted during the past year by pharmacies to the state Department of Human Services as its "usual and customary" price.

In October 2006, an enhancement was added that allows pharmacies to directly update prices via a secure web link on the site to reflect their current prices.

Including generic alternatives

In June 2007, information about generic equivalent and therapeutic alternative medication options was added to Minnesota RxPrice Compare. Some of the brand name medications include a list of generic medications that may be cost effective alternatives to the more expensive brand name medication. The site also includes therapeutic alternative medication options for high-priced brand name medications that do not have a generic and a printable list of alternative medication in other categories.

This information is available in other forms to people with disabilities by contacting the Minnesota Department of Human Services at (651) 431-2019. TTY/TDD users can call the Minnesota Relay at 711 or (800) 627-3529. For the Speech-to-Speech Relay, call (877) 627-3748.