

For Immediate Release  
April 13, 2006  
2006/nr-021

## **MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT IMPROVING PATIENT ACCESS TO DRUGS** *Launches Comprehensive Plan To Obtain Better Value For Taxpayer Dollars*

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is moving to improve patient access to drugs through an innovative and comprehensive plan to reform Ontario’s drug system, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

“This package is about improving patient access to drugs, and to do so more quickly and more transparently,” said Smitherman. “We also need to get better value for our money in order to make our drug system -- and our entire health care system -- more effective and sustainable. Better drug pricing would mean we can reinvest savings in the drug system and make sure consumers get the innovative drugs they need.”

Legislation introduced today will, if passed, allow for the implementation of the government’s plan. The plan would:

- Improve patient access to drugs through conditional listings and rapid reviews of breakthrough drugs
- Ensure better value for money through changes to drug pricing and reimbursement
- Recognize the valuable role pharmacists play in patient care by paying them to provide enhanced patient counseling about the appropriate use of medications
- Invest in innovative health system research by establishing a fund to show that drugs produce positive outcomes in other parts of the system
- Reduce paperwork for doctors by replacing the cumbersome Section 8 process
- Strengthen transparency and accountability in the drug system by giving patients a role in drug listing decisions and appointing an Executive Officer of the Ontario public drug programs to manage the publicly funded drug system.

“All of these proposed changes are designed to benefit patients. And all patients will continue to receive the drugs they currently receive,” Smitherman said. “There will be no change whatsoever to benefits, to co-payments, to deductibles, or to eligibility for Ontario Drug Program recipients.”

Drug costs have risen more than 140 per cent since 1997 – with the government spending \$3.4 billion annually on the Ontario Drug Benefit Program. Employers in the province, who use the government’s drug formulary as a guide to determine what drugs they will pay for, have also been experiencing dramatic increases and now spend \$2.6 billion a year.

The proposed changes announced today are based on recommendations from the Drug System

Secretariat, which reviewed and consulted widely on the provincial drug system and found that there were significant opportunities to provide patients with better access to drugs, and that Ontario was not getting good value for the money it spends on prescription drugs.

“The work done by the Drug System Secretariat is bold,” said Marc Kealey, president of the Ontario Pharmacist Association. “The changes proposed today recognize that pharmacists are critical to the success of any health care system.”

"The drug system changes in Ontario will greatly benefit patients in the province," said Karen Philp, National Director of Public Policy and Government Relations with the Canadian Diabetes Association. "Patients, particularly those living with a chronic disease like diabetes, will have better access to the drugs they need and they will now have a say in the decisions being made on drug funding."

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities – keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

-30-

**Media Contacts:**

David Spencer  
Minister's Office  
416-327-4320

John Letherby  
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care  
416-314-6197

Members of the general public: 416-327-4327, or 1-800-268-1154

This news release, along with other media materials, such as matte stories and audio clips, on other subjects, are available on our website at: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca> under the News Media section.

For more information on achievements in health care, visit: [www.resultsontario.gov.on.ca](http://www.resultsontario.gov.on.ca).

*Disponible en français.*