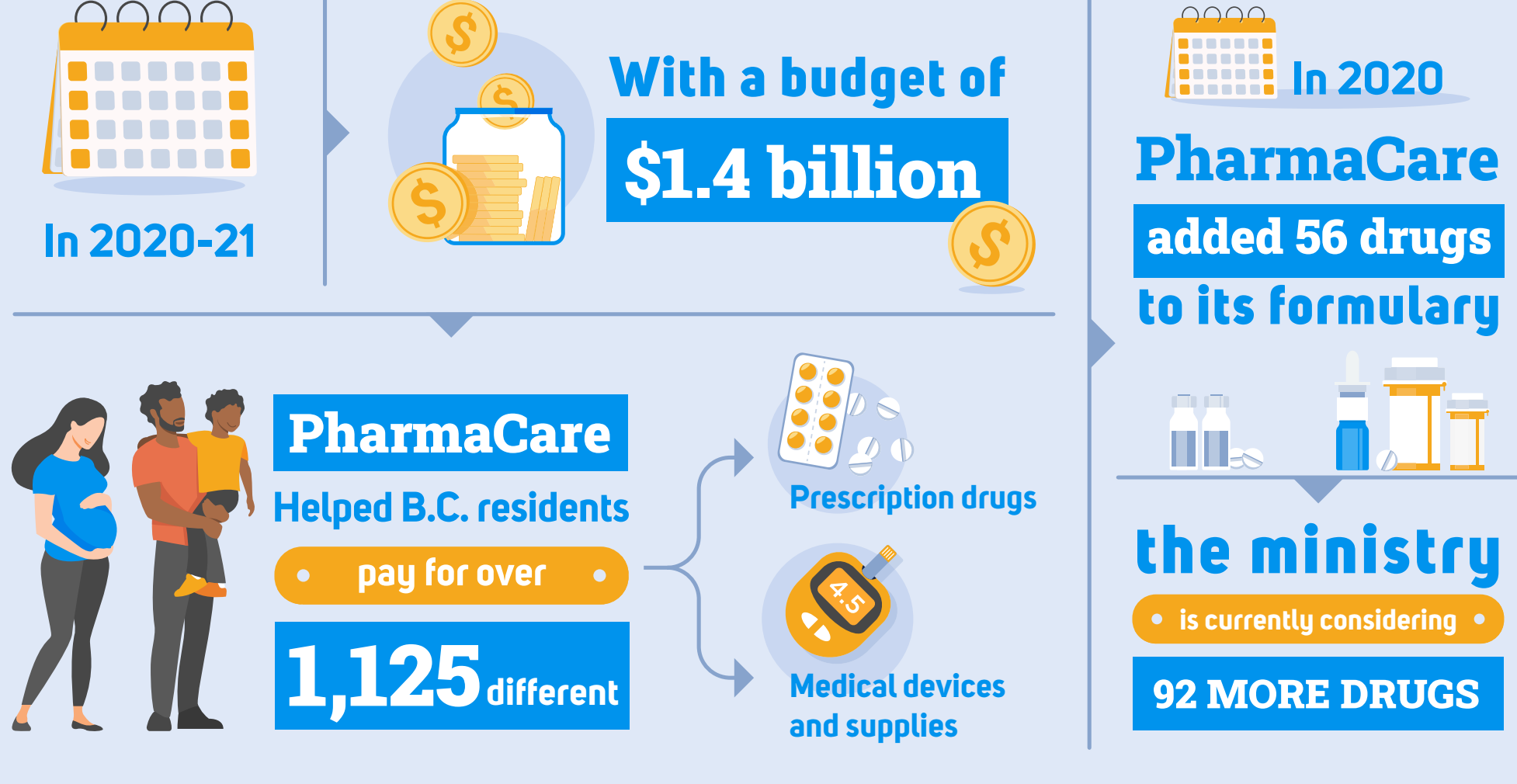




BC PharmaCare

Building the PharmaCare Formulary



How does B.C.'s public drug insurance program decide which drugs to cover?

With a budget of more than \$1.4 billion in 2020-21, PharmaCare helped B.C. residents pay for over 1,125 different drugs and medical devices and supplies such as prostheses, insulin pumps and blood glucose test strips.

In 2020, PharmaCare added 56 drugs to its formulary – the list of drugs it covers – ranging from isavuconazole (Cresemba™) for treating a rare fungal infection to long-acting buprenorphine (Sublocade™) for managing opioid use disorder. The ministry is currently considering 92 more.

“We carefully consider patient safety and are committed to getting the best drugs for the best value, to offer B.C. residents the best coverage,” said Clifford Lo, PharmaCare’s director of Formulary Management. “It is no small task. A drug review can take 12 months from start to finish, and decisions call on the expertise of physicians, pharmacists, nurses, economists, policy experts, statisticians, ethicists, and the public.”



The Approval Path for Drug X

How do most drugs go from Health Canada’s Ottawa offices to being covered by PharmaCare at the B.C. pharmacy counter? Follow the fictional Drug X as it moves through the approval process to become part of B.C.’s public drug insurance program.

Green light

Health Canada issues a [Notice of Compliance](#) to Drug X’s manufacturer. This means Drug X has been found to be effective and meets [Food and Drugs Act](#) safety standards. The drug’s benefits outweigh the risks, and any risks can be mitigated. Drug X can be sold in Canada.

National review

The manufacturer submits Drug X to the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH). CADTH’s Common Drug Review is essential to public insurance coverage decisions. CADTH reviews clinical studies, patient and clinician input, cost-effectiveness, and how Drug X compares to other therapies that treat the same condition (compared to a placebo). They recommend whether public drug insurance programs should cover Drug X, at which price, and under which criteria (e.g., for which medical conditions or following other treatments a patient has tried).

Request for PharmaCare coverage

Drug X’s manufacturer submits a coverage request to BC PharmaCare. The [submission](#) includes safety reports, budget impact estimates, disease prevalence data, the CADTH review and recommendation, and other materials to show the drug is safe, effective and has value for British Columbians.

Public input

PharmaCare launches a public [Your Voice](#) survey. Patients, caregivers, and patient advocacy groups answer questions about what it’s like to live with the disease that Drug X treats and their experience with treatments.

Independent assessment

PharmaCare asks the independent advisory Drug Benefit Council (DBC) for recommendations. The DBC has three public members and nine professionals with expertise in medicine, pharmacy, pharmacoeconomics (an area of economics that compares the value of one drug to another) and ethics. The DBC considers Drug X in the B.C. context: will it help meet our most pressing health-care needs? They may recommend specific criteria for coverage (e.g., patients must be diagnosed with Disease W and have tried Drug V with no success), and a price reduction.

In-house deliberations

BC PharmaCare’s team of pharmacists, economists and policymakers study the submission, patient input, clinician input and the recommendations from CADTH and the DBC. PharmaCare makes a final decision on whether covering Drug X provides value for B.C. residents.

Strength in numbers

The PharmaCare team joins other provinces in the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance to negotiate with Drug X’s manufacturer. By working together, the provinces have better negotiating power to get the best price.

An agreement

Negotiations end with a product listing agreement for Drug X. This lays out the contractual terms for adding Drug X to the formulary (e.g., the price and criteria patients will have to meet to get coverage for the drug).

Listing day!

PharmaCare adds Drug X to its appropriate coverage plans. The listing of Drug X is announced publicly. It goes live in [PharmaNet](#), the computer network that contains records of every prescription dispensed in a B.C. community pharmacy. When a pharmacist enters a prescription for Drug X, coverage is automatically reflected at the till.

Recent listings

June 2021:

The Dexcom G6 continuous glucose monitor for eligible patients with diabetes. Expected to benefit 60,000 British Columbians in the first three years.

October 2021:

Elexacaftor-tezacaftor-ivacaftor (Trikafta®), a new drug therapy for patients with cystic fibrosis. Expected to benefit 400 B.C. patients.

“All these steps ensure that PharmaCare is fair, consistent and sustainable. We do make some very difficult decisions, weighing costs and benefits, to make the best possible decision for a public drug plan,” says Tijana Fazlagic, executive director of the Therapeutic Assessment & Access Branch. “PharmaCare has been helping people in B.C. for nearly half a century. We proudly take up the work every day, keeping pace with developments in medicine and pharmacology and responding to the needs of our population.”

Learn more at [Drug Review Process](#) and read summaries of past [PharmaCare drug decisions](#). Interested in being involved? See [Your Voice](#) for current public surveys.

Over 780,000 B.C. residents received help with drug and medical supply costs in 2020-21

Top 10 drugs covered, by number of people helped

Generic name	Typical use	Number of people PharmaCare helped with costs
ramipril	hypertension	103,533
atorvastatin calcium	high cholesterol	99,897
amlodipine besylate	hypertension	99,483
levothyroxine sodium	hypothyroidism	96,667
rosuvastatin calcium	high cholesterol	95,203
metformin hcl	diabetes	88,730
salbutamol sulphate	asthma and lung diseases	83,155
acetaminophen/codeine/caffeine	pain	64,677
amoxicillin	bacterial infections	62,197
gabapentin	seizures, nerve pain	60,308

This is part two of a three-part series exploring BC PharmaCare. This series highlights how PharmaCare helps people in B.C. pay for prescription drugs and medical supplies, how the program decides which drugs to cover and how PharmaNet connects patients to prescribers, pharmacists and other essential partners. Read part one: [How the Different PharmaCare Plans Help British Columbians](#).

And stay tuned for part three: [How Much Does PharmaCare Help With Drug Costs?](#)

We welcome your input and feedback. Contact us at: MOHNNewsletter@gov.bc.ca

