

# Questions and Answers: Updated Income Eligibility Thresholds for the Seniors Co-Payment Program (SCP) under the Ontario Drug Benefit Program

## **Question 1: What has changed?**

The income eligibility thresholds for the Seniors Co-Payment Program (SCP), under the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) Program, are being updated from \$22,200 to \$25,000 (for single seniors) and \$37,100 to \$41,500 (for senior couples) effective August 1, 2024.

The threshold for “single seniors” applies to seniors who are single, or no longer cohabiting with a spouse because the spouse is living in a long-term care home, home for special care, or a home that is part of the Ministry of Health’s Community Homes for Opportunity program.

The threshold for “senior couples” applies to seniors who cohabit with a spouse.

## **Question 2: Why was the change made?**

The Ontario government recognizes that living on a fixed income can create gaps in care, something that many seniors in Ontario face. These updates ensure that the Seniors Co-Payment Program income eligibility thresholds better reflect cost-of-living increases in Ontario and continue to be in line with increases to income supports for seniors. With the updated thresholds, more seniors in Ontario will pay no annual deductible and will have a lower co-payment for prescription medications covered under the Ontario Drug Benefit Program.

## **Question 3: Why did it take so long for the government to increase the income threshold for this program?**

The current income eligibility thresholds were last updated on August 1, 2021, using projected cost of living growth to ensure that they remained fair and relevant for several years. The government is now updating the thresholds to ensure continued access to the Seniors Co-Payment Program for low-income seniors.

**Question 4: How were the new income eligibility thresholds calculated?**

The updated thresholds were determined by adjusting for the inflation that has happened in Ontario since the last threshold update in 2021 and considering cost-of-living increases to payments under various government programs for which seniors may be eligible, which would increase a senior's income. This update helps to ensure that the thresholds continue to remain relevant and stay above income support levels for seniors.

**Question 5: What is the difference in drug benefits between seniors who are eligible for the SCP and those who are not?**

All OHIP-insured seniors aged 65 years and over automatically qualify for the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) Program. On the first day of the month after they turn 65 years of age, all OHIP-insured Ontarians are automatically enrolled in the ODB Program, which covers most of the costs of more than 5,000 prescription drug products. Generally, seniors pay the first \$100 of their prescription drug costs each year (annual deductible) before they are eligible for drug coverage. After the deductible is paid, seniors then pay up to \$6.11 toward the dispensing fee for every prescription (a co-payment). The Seniors Co-Payment Program (SCP) is an application-based program under the ODB for seniors with incomes less than certain income eligibility thresholds. Seniors enrolled in the SCP pay no annual deductible and a reduced co-payment of up to \$2 per each prescription. The lower cost improves access to essential drugs.

**Question 6: How would this change impact seniors financially?**

The updated income eligibility thresholds ensure that more low-income seniors are eligible for the Seniors Co-Payment Program. Seniors who are enrolled in the SCP pay no annual deductible and a reduced co-payment. It is estimated that low-income seniors enrolled in the SCP save an average of about \$105-\$120 per year on prescription drug costs compared to seniors who are not.

**Question 7: When can seniors apply for the Seniors Co-Payment Program under the new thresholds?**

Ontarians who are currently 65 years of age or older, or who are turning 65 on or after July 1, 2024, and who meet the new income eligibility thresholds may apply to the Seniors Co-Payment Program (SCP) beginning in May 2024. Eligible seniors will benefit from the elimination of the deductible and a reduced co-payment as of August 1, 2024.

Eligible seniors are encouraged to apply in advance of the start of the upcoming SCP year, which begins on August 1, 2024, to ensure they receive the reduction in their drug deductible and co-payment as of that date. This will ensure that those who are eligible receive the benefit of no deductible and a lower co-payment as soon as they are eligible

and won't face out-of-pocket expenses. Approximately 80% of all completed SCP applications are processed within 7 business days and 100% are processed within 10 business days.

**Question 8: How can Ontarians apply to the SCP under the new thresholds?**

To avoid unnecessary delays and ensure timely processing, complete the Seniors Co-Payment Program Application available on <https://forms.ontariodrugbenefit.ca>.

The online form will guide applicants through the process to ensure all the information required for enrolment is provided before submission.

Refer to the [Guide to Understanding the Seniors Co-Payment Program](#) for more information.

If a computer is not accessible and the application cannot be completed online, the form can be mailed. Request a paper copy of the SCP application form and guide by:

- tel.: 416-503-4586 (in the Toronto area)
- toll-free: 1-888-405-0405
- sending an email to the SCP at [seniors@ontariodrugbenefit.ca](mailto:seniors@ontariodrugbenefit.ca)

**Question 9: What happens to seniors who are already enrolled in the SCP?**

Seniors who are already enrolled are not affected by the revised income eligibility thresholds and are not required to take any action. They will continue to receive benefits under the SCP.

**Question 10: How would this change impact businesses/pharmacies?**

There is no impact to businesses, including pharmacies. Pharmacies would be expected to help communicate the income eligibility threshold changes to seniors as part of their regular business practices.

**General Q&As Related to the Seniors Co-Payment Program (SCP)**

**Question 1: What is the SCP?**

The Seniors Co-Payment Program (SCP) is an application-based program under the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) Program that provides financial assistance to qualifying seniors by reducing their out-of-pocket drug costs. All OHIP-insured seniors aged 65 years and over automatically qualify for the ODB Program on the first day of the month following the

month the person attains 65 years of age. Generally, seniors pay a \$100 annual deductible before they are eligible for drug coverage. After the deductible is paid, seniors then pay a co-payment of up to \$6.11 toward the dispensing fee per prescription.

Seniors enrolled in the SCP have no annual deductible and a per prescription co-payment of up to \$2. To be eligible for the SCP, seniors must apply by submitting an application to the SCP and must have an income equal to or below the income eligibility thresholds for single seniors or senior couples. These income thresholds are currently set out in section 20.2 of Ontario Regulation 201/96 under the *Ontario Drug Benefit Act*.

The threshold for “single seniors” applies to seniors who are single, or no longer cohabiting with a spouse because the spouse is living in a long-term care home, home for special care, or a home that is part of the Ministry of Health’s Community Homes for Opportunity program.

The threshold for “senior couples” applies to seniors who cohabit with a spouse.

## **Question 2: What is covered under the ODB Program?**

The ODB Program covers **most of the cost of approximately 5,000** prescription drug products. In addition, there are over 1,000 drugs that may be covered by the Exceptional Access Program (EAP) if specific clinical criteria are met. EAP requests are reviewed on a case-by-case basis based on the patient’s individual clinical situation and certain criteria specific to each drug.

The ODB Program also helps to pay for:

- some products used in monitoring and testing for diabetes
- some prescribed over-the-counter drugs under specific circumstances (for example, Ibuprofen 200mg, Ferrous fumarate 300mg)
- some nutrition products
- some drugs used in the treatment of HIV/AIDS
- some drugs used in palliative care
- help to quit smoking:
  - up to a year of pharmacist-assisted counselling (talk to your pharmacist or health care provider)
  - drugs for treatment

## **Question 3: How many seniors are enrolled in the SCP?**

Through the ODB Program, the government provides drug benefits to over 6 million eligible recipients. Of those, over 436,000 seniors were registered in the SCP as of the 2022/23 program year.

#### **Question 4: How do seniors learn about the SCP?**

A letter is sent to all Ontarians about three months prior to their 65th birthday to let them know they will **automatically be covered** under the Ontario Drug Benefit Program on the first day of the month after they turn 65 years of age. The letter also provides information about the SCP and how to apply.

Information on the SCP is also provided to Ontarians enrolled in social assistance programs who are approaching their 65<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Information regarding the ODB Program and the SCP is also available via pharmacies and pharmacists.

#### **Question 5: Who is eligible for the SCP?**

The SCP is an application-based program, available to Ontarians with a valid Ontario Health Card number, who are 65 years of age or older, whose income is equal to or below the income eligibility thresholds:

##### For Program Year 2023/24 that ends July 31, 2024

- a single senior: the senior's annual net income must be less than or equal to \$22,200
- a senior who cohabits with a spouse: their combined annual net income must be less than or equal to \$37,100.

##### For Program Year 2024/25 that starts August 1, 2024

- a single senior: the senior's annual net income must be less than or equal to \$25,000
- a senior who cohabits with a spouse: their combined annual net income must be less than or equal to \$41,500.

The threshold for "single seniors" applies to seniors who are single, or no longer cohabiting with a spouse because the spouse is living in a long-term care home, home for special care, or a home that is part of the Ministry of Health's Community Homes for Opportunity program.

#### **Question 6: When were the SCP income eligibility thresholds previously updated?**

Prior to these 2024 changes, the SCP income eligibility thresholds were last updated in 2021.

#### **Question 7: How does the ministry confirm that an SCP applicant is eligible?**

The income of applicants for the SCP is confirmed when they apply to the SCP. The majority of applicants are enrolled based on the income information the ministry retrieves

from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), as consent for the CRA's disclosure of income tax information to the ministry is mandatory for enrollment.

For those whose income cannot be retrieved from the CRA, they can provide their Notice of Assessment or other income documentation to confirm their eligibility.

SCP applicants who refuse to provide CRA consent, or who withdraw previously granted consent, are not eligible for SCP coverage but are eligible to receive drug benefits under the ODB Program as seniors.