

Drugs and Devices Division
Drug Programs Delivery Branch
3rd Floor, 5700 Yonge Street
Toronto ON M2M 4K5

Division des médicaments et appareils fonctionnels
Direction de la mise en œuvre des programmes de médicaments
5700, rue Yonge, 3^e étage
Toronto ON M2M 4K5

Telephone: (416) 327-8109
Toll Free: 1-866-811-9893
Facsimile: (416) 327-8912
Toll Free 1-866-598-6530
www.ontario.ca/health

Téléphone : (416) 327-8109
Sans frais : 1 866 811-9893
Télécopieur : (416) 327-8912
Sans frais : 1 866 598-6530
www.ontario.ca/sante

Email Address/Courriel: drugprogramsdelivery@ontario.ca

May 14, 2020

Robert Bick and Deb Maskens
info@cancertaintyforall.ca

Dear Mr. Bick and Ms Maskens,

Thank you for your letter on behalf of the CanCertainty Coalition requesting policy actions and flexibility for cancer patients during the COVID-19 emergency. I can assure you that the Ministry of Health has been giving due diligence to reviewing your requests and evaluating other actions to support Ontarians patients.

The Ministry recognizes the challenges being faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of access to drug treatments for all patients, including those dealing with cancer, during this difficult time. Many parties are involved in ensuring that the health system works together to achieve this, including the Ministry of Health. Like many governments across Canada and around the world, Ontario is looking at how to adapt programs to ensure that patients continue to have access to clinically effective and cost-effective treatments.

We understand the importance of the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program for Ontarians, especially during the COVID situation, and are making every effort to ensure Ontarians can get enrolled and receive drug benefits under the ODB program, including the Trillium Drug Program (TDP), as quickly as possible.

The annual deductible for a TDP household is payable quarterly in order to distribute the deductible throughout the year, making it affordable for households. The TDP is intended for people who are not otherwise eligible for the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program as social assistance or homecare recipients, for example. The TDP pays the cost of a household's drugs, above the 4% of income that is contributed by household members.

While the ministry is not contemplating deferring deductibles, on May 13 the Minister announced a change that will benefit households whose income changes later in the benefit year. Households can now ask that their deductible be reassessed based on projected income in either calendar year that overlaps the benefit year.

For example, for the current benefit year, if a household's income in either 2019 or 2020 has changed by more than 10% from its 2018 income, the household can now ask to have its deductible for the remainder of the benefit year reassessed.

This financial relief will particularly benefit anyone who has lost a job due to COVID-19, or had to leave one due to a cancer diagnosis or other condition. This change gives households more flexibility to maximize ministry coverage, in addition to previous changes made to the TDP that we collaborated on, such as increased flexibility in selecting an enrollment start date.

To facilitate the application process for Trillium Drug Program (TDP) during the COVID-19 pandemic, applications can now be submitted through fax or email. In addition, enrollment times for the TDP have been reduced through more frequent verification of income with the Canada Revenue Agency.

Expedited enrollment in the TDP continues to be available when a strong justification/rationale is provided demonstrating that TDP enrolment must be confirmed within a 48-hour timeframe to ensure that client lifesaving treatments can commence immediately.

Regarding cancer treatment algorithms, the ministry has considered and evaluated interim measures for cancer treatments that would mitigate risk of exposure of cancer patients to COVID-19 while being mindful of the stress and anxiety of cancer patients who need timely access to effective cancer therapies.

The Ministry has approved several interim measures for cancer treatments that would mitigate risk of exposure to the coronavirus while supporting emergency measures as deemed necessary by public health officials.

The Ministry has been working closely with Ontario Health - Cancer Care Ontario (OH-CCO) and clinicians to ensure that patients will receive undisrupted and timely access to important cancer treatments.

These include interim measures which clinicians have requested including the use of oral regimens that may serve as temporary alternatives to support patients during this time when certain surgeries, procedures or hospital-based treatments may not be available or more limited. For example, some oral treatments will be used that may avoid a visit by the patient to the hospital. Certain medications that require radiographic scans to evaluate the treatment response at the time of renewal will continue to be funded until the test becomes available again.

Working with health system partners, we are committed to supporting cancer patients through evidence-based treatment protocols.

Your final recommendation relates to the Exceptional Access Program (EAP). This program continues to ensure uninterrupted access for EAP drug products. As prescriber appointments have become more limited during the pandemic and patients are asked to stay at home as much as possible, the Executive Officer of the Ontario Public Drug Programs authorized the automatic extension of all EAP approvals that expire between February 1, 2020 and May 31, 2020 by an additional 90 days from the original expiry date on the approval. We will shortly be informing prescribers of an additional automatic extension of all EAP approvals with an approval end date that expired or is expiring between May 1, 2020 to August 31, 2020 by an additional 90 days from the expiry date listed on the approval letter.

These extensions help patients avoid interruption of access to the drug, and enable the EAP to focus on new and urgent requests needed by Ontarians during this time.

The EAP triages requests for cancer drugs as top priority and, to keep patients and their prescribers informed, the turnaround times are posted on the ministry's website.

In closing, I would like to thank CanCertainty for your continued work on behalf of cancer patients and your willingness to work collaboratively with the ministry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'David Schachow', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

David Schachow
Director