

### Medication Reviews

**The Challenge:** Plan sponsors risk not getting full value from drug benefits because employees may not be taking their medications properly, especially when they have chronic conditions. This increases the risk of poor health outcomes, presenteeism, absenteeism and additional benefits costs.

- 55% of Canadians aged 45 to 64 take at least one prescription drug; 11% take five or more concurrently. Among those aged 25 to 44, 28% take at least one medication.<sup>1</sup>
- An incomplete understanding of medications increases the risk of nonadherence (that is, not taking the drug as prescribed) and other adverse events. Combining prescription drugs with nonprescription drugs or natural health products also increases the risk of adverse events. One Canadian study reports that “adverse drug-related events accounted for 12% of emergency department visits, of which 68% were considered preventable.”<sup>2</sup>
- Plan members with chronic conditions often see family physicians and specialists and go to multiple pharmacies, which can result in duplicate or conflicting medications.

#### What it is

Pharmacists do a comprehensive review of all medications (prescription and nonprescription), educate plan members on their use, and check for appropriateness, safety and effectiveness.

#### How it works

Plan members meet with their pharmacists for 20 to 30 minutes. As part of the consultation they receive a complete medication summary for their personal records and to share with healthcare professionals.

#### Benefits

Increased likelihood of best health outcomes due to a better understanding of medications and how to take them, which protects the value of drug benefits by preventing drug wastage and inappropriate use.

*“Drugs don’t work in patients who don’t take them.” — C. Everett Koop, M.D.*

**The Opportunity:** Plan members taking multiple medications can receive comprehensive medication reviews from community pharmacists, who check that all medications (prescription, nonprescription, supplements and natural health products) are appropriate, safe and effective. They also ensure that plan members understand how to take their medications properly.

The majority of community pharmacies offer medication reviews,<sup>3</sup> largely in response to government-funded medication review programs in some provinces. The service typically targets patients taking multiple medications and/or having one or more chronic conditions. A recent Canadian pilot project for medication reviews and additional pharmacists’ services found that one in four plan members was eligible to receive a medication review (i.e., taking three or more medications to treat chronic diseases).<sup>4</sup> And a survey of more than 500 pharmacy customers who received government-funded medication reviews indicated that levels of understanding noticeably improved: for example, 85% reported having a very good or excellent understanding of their medications’ potential interactions with other drugs and foods, up from 62% prior to the review.<sup>5</sup>

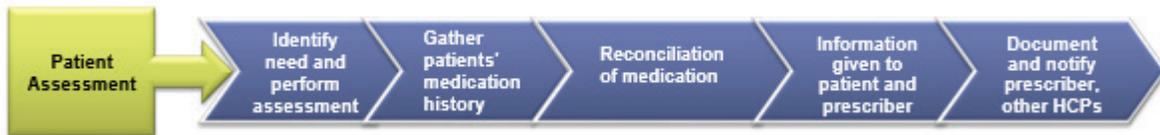
#### How the Service Works

**Covered under the healthcare spending account or as a health benefit, pharmacists’ healthcare services help plan members stay healthy, productive, and in the workplace**

## Getting Better Value from Drug Plans: Pharmacists' Healthcare Services

- Members of the pharmacy team identify eligible plan members and recommend medication reviews. Or plan members may request the service at their usual community pharmacy after learning about it on their own or from their employer.
- Pharmacists assess all medications, including prescription, nonprescription, supplements and natural health products, and ensure plan members understand why they are taking them, the benefits of taking them and how to take them. They walk through possible side effects and check for possible interactions between medications, and provide tips to support adherence based on the plan member's personal circumstances (e.g., to address shift work).
- Plan members receive a comprehensive, easy-to-understand list of their medications for their personal records, for use in emergencies, and to share with other healthcare professionals.
- Medication reviews are recommended annually to address possible changes in medications and to refresh plan members' level of understanding. Pharmacists may also recommend a brief follow-up review three or four months after an annual review, to further reinforce plan members' understanding of their medications.
- If medication reviews uncover drug-related issues or if patients express concerns that cannot be appropriately addressed in a single review or follow-up review, pharmacists may recommend a series of more in-depth consultations that are often referred to as **medication care plans** or **medication therapy management** services. If the issues pose an immediate threat to health, the pharmacist will refer the plan member to their physician or appropriate healthcare professional.

### Medication Review



### Types of Services Covered under Medication Reviews (see Glossary for definitions)

- Medication reviews
- Medication review follow-ups

### Expected Benefits for Plan Sponsors

- Prevention of presenteeism and absenteeism associated with nonadherence, side effects and other drug-related adverse events.
- Prevention of drug wastage and lost value for drug-plan dollars for higher-use claimants (i.e., those taking multiple medications and/or medications for chronic conditions).
- Averted spending on drugs associated with undisclosed nonadherence; i.e., plan members do not disclose their nonadherence to physicians, who increase dosages or prescribe more medications because they believe the original prescription was not effective.

*"These reviews are really good because you can interact with someone between doctors' appointments and get confirmation that you're doing something right. That's important."*

*—Feedback from a patient who regularly receives medication reviews<sup>6</sup>*

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### References

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