



## Summary of provincial changes affecting group benefit plans

07-01

Each year, provincial governments make changes that affect coverage under both public and private benefit plans. Outlined below are the changes Great-West Life believes will be of greatest interest to plan sponsors. This is not intended to be a complete listing of all changes for 2006, but rather a summary that highlights key developments. Plan sponsors may have learned of some of these changes through previous GroupLines.

### Quebec

**RAMQ drug coverage amended** – RAMQ adjusted the Basic Prescription Drug Insurance Plan. Changes that became effective July 1, 2006, included the following:

- The minimum coverage of RAMQ formulary drugs that plan sponsors must offer plan members who are residents of Quebec decreased to 71 per cent from 71.5 per cent.
- The annual out-of-pocket maximum for RAMQ formulary drugs increased to \$881 from \$857.
- The monthly deductible increased to \$12.10 from \$11.90.
- The annual premium that Quebec residents must pay for RAMQ coverage increased to \$538 from \$521.

### Quebec may ease private healthcare restrictions –

The Quebec government introduced Bill 33 (*an Act to amend the Act respecting health services and social services and other legislative provisions*). The government is currently holding hearings about the bill. If enacted, Bill 33 will amend several pieces of Quebec legislation relating to healthcare access, and open the door to private healthcare in Quebec in a limited way. Its main focus is to create greater access to health care and reduce treatment delays that occur in the public health system.

### Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) introduced –

The province of Quebec implemented the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan to provide maternity, paternity and parental benefits to its residents. The program replaces the maternity, paternity and parental benefits previously provided to Quebec residents through the federal employment insurance program. It provides benefits to employees who take time off work for the birth or adoption of a child.

### Ontario

**Mandatory retirement ends** – As of December 12, 2006, Ontario law protects employees aged 65 and older from age discrimination. Provincially regulated employers can no longer force employees to retire solely because they have reached age 65.

**Province of Ontario reforms drug system** – Ontario's Bill 102 (*Transparent Drug System for Patients Act, 2006*) passed in the province's legislature in June. The reforms are intended to improve patients' access to drugs under the public program, promote appropriate use of drugs and bolster the governance and operation of the public drug system. Among the changes were increased access to lower-cost generic drugs, a more rapid provincial review process for some drugs and greater ease in obtaining approval for drugs that are not part of the Ontario Drug Benefit general formulary.

### Alberta

**Out-of-province and out-of-country chiropractic, optometric, dental and podiatric services** – Effective July 1, 2006, Alberta no longer covers chiropractic, optometric, dental and podiatric services received out-of-province or out-of-country. These services, when provided outside Alberta for an Alberta resident, will be covered under Great-West insured plans and administrative services only plans according to the terms of a plan sponsor's current benefit plan.

**Pharmacists to prescribe some drugs** – The Alberta government has passed legislation that allows pharmacists to prescribe some drug treatments, continue prescriptions made by other health practitioners and administer injection drug treatments, such as vaccines. These changes take effect in April 2007. The intent of the Alberta government is to provide patients with better access to drug treatments, particularly basic drugs, in situations where prescriptions need to be extended. Pharmacists will be able to prescribe drugs when they have had extra training, subject to specific limits established by the Alberta College of Pharmacists.

## Manitoba

**PPI status changed** – Manitoba Pharmacare changed the status of Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPIs) from Part 2 to Part 3. Effective March 13, 2006, Manitoba Pharmacare requires that patients starting PPI therapy for the first time meet Exception Drug Status (EDS) criteria in order to be eligible for Pharmacare coverage. Those who commenced PPI therapy prior to March 13, 2006, will continue to have Pharmacare coverage for eligible PPIs until January 15, 2007. After this date, Manitoba Pharmacare will require that all patients meet EDS criteria in order to have continued coverage of eligible PPIs. The drugs affected by this change are Apo-Omeprazole, Losec, Pariet, Pantoloc and Prevacid.

**New Manitoba Pharmacare deductible rates** – The provincial government increased Pharmacare family deductible rates for the 2006-2007 benefit year. The rates, which took effect April 1, 2006, are as follows:

Adjusted Total Family Income	Manitoba Pharmacare Deductible as a Percentage of Adjusted Total Family Income	
	2005-2006 Pharmacare Plan Year	2006-2007 Pharmacare Plan Year
Less than or equal to \$15,000	2.44 %	2.56 %
Greater than \$15,000 and less than or equal to \$40,000	3.65 %	3.83 %
Greater than \$40,000 and less than or equal to \$75,000	4.20 %	4.41 %
Greater than \$75,000	5.25 %	5.51 %

## Newfoundland and Labrador

**Children's dental health** – The Newfoundland and Labrador government announced changes to its children's dental health program, which provides coverage of basic dental services to children 12 and younger, subject to a co-payment. Effective September 1, 2006, the government plan is the payer of last resort for families with private insurance.

**Prescription drug program** – The provincial government announced it is considering an expansion of the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program to include additional low-income residents. The program provides assistance in the purchase of pharmaceuticals and some related medical supplies. Details of the expansion are limited; the government is expected to propose legislation to take effect in 2007. At the same time, the legislation would make the government program second payer.

**Bill 25** – Bill 25 became law on May 26, 2006. Under the new law, family status was added as a prohibited ground of discrimination. The law also prohibits mandatory retirement effective May 26, 2007.

## Nova Scotia

**Pharmacare for low-income children** – The Nova Scotia Low-Income Pharmacare for Children program became effective October 1, 2006. It will potentially help up to 35,000 children under the age of 18 whose families receive the Nova Scotia Child Benefit.

## For more information

Please contact your benefits advisor or Great-West group representative.

*This GroupLine is for general use and informational purposes only. It is not intended to be legal or tax advice. You should consult your professional advisors about your particular circumstances.*