

Pharma companies could be forced to reveal payments to B.C. doctors

Ministry of Health launching consultations on a health sector payment transparency program

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B.C. is asking if pharmaceutical companies should have to disclose payments to doctors and health authorities. (CBC)

B.C. could soon require drug companies to reveal any payments they make to doctors and other health professionals in an attempt to be transparent about any potential conflicts of interest. If it goes ahead, the province's proposed health sector payment transparency program would cover payments and services

handed out by pharmaceutical companies and equipment manufacturers.

"I think what it does is it puts the patient more at the centre of health care, so the patient has knowledge and responsibility," Health Minister Adrian Dix told CBC.

"I think it also helps doctors as well, who are sometimes questioned on these matters and who I think in general would greatly prefer a transparent system."

- **Ontario bill would require disclosure of pharmaceutical payments to health professionals**

Payments and transactions with health authorities and other publicly funded health organizations would also need to be disclosed through the proposed program.

The ministry has asked 50 groups and individuals to consult on the idea over the summer, including health professional colleges, patient advocacy organizations and pharmaceutical companies.

Dix wasn't able to give an estimate for when such a program might become a reality, explaining that it depends on what comes out of the consultations this summer.

But he said the issue of undue influence from pharmaceutical companies has been on his radar for years.

- **Show us how and why drug companies are paying doctors, ask medical leaders**

"There are hundreds and hundreds of what are known as drug detailers in B.C., whose job essentially is to sell ... prescription drugs, mainly to a relatively small number of doctors," he said.

"Those relationships sometimes have been problematic."

Calls for Canada-wide disclosure

The Ontario government recently drafted new regulations requiring disclosure of payments by drug companies, and a group of health researchers and doctors called Open Pharma is lobbying the federal government to make disclosure mandatory across the country.

"Such reporting is not intended to shame prescribers or impede partnerships between industry and professionals," Open Pharma members [wrote in a 2017 letter to the federal Health Ministry](#).

"Rather, disclosure will help ensure that potential conflicts of interest that result from receiving payments are openly acknowledged, so that patients and prescribers can make more informed decisions."

- **'This information is useless': Drug companies reveal they paid millions to doctors but don't say why**

In the U.S., the 2013 Physician Payments Sunshine Act forces companies to report all payments of more than \$10 made to doctors, dentists, chiropractors and other health professionals. Similar laws are in place in Australia and parts of Europe.

Last year, 10 of the largest drug companies in Canada voluntarily disclosed how much money they'd given to physicians but did not reveal who the doctors were or the reasons for the payments.