

End of patents means huge \$2B windfall in cheap drugs

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The province's drug plan is about to realize up to \$2 billion in savings when patents expire on some of the most popular and expensive brand-name drugs, according to the Canadian Association of Chain Drug Stores.

Russell Cohen, chairman of

the CACDS, said the Ontario government will be in a good position to begin compensating pharmacists for services they now provide patients for free, and also to cover additional services the health-care professionals are uniquely positioned to offer.

The current Ontario drug plan funding model is "outdated," paying for the dispens-

ing of prescription drugs but not phone consultations with doctors or dealings with third-party drug plans, for example, Cohen said.

"Pharmacists have been providing services for years. Those services have been increasing, but the funding model is still based on filling a prescription," he said.

A study commissioned by

the CACDS found the average cost for dispensing and all the other services provided by pharmacists was about \$14 per prescription.

The CACDS believes the province's drug plan can afford to invest more in pharmacy services over the next few years because a number of high-volume drugs will no longer be protected by

patents, meaning cheaper generic drugs can be substituted. Patents on such popular drugs as heart medicines Lipitor Norvasc, Crestor, Plavix and Diovan; pain medications Celebrex and Oxycontin; and Alzheimer's treatment Exelon and Aricept are to expire between 2009 and '14, the CACDS says.

Private drug plans will see

savings over that time period, but the Ontario drug plan's windfall is largest because of its size. David Jensen, spokesman for the Ontario Ministry of Health, said it's expected spending on these prescription drugs will go down, but not as significantly as projected by the CACDS.

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