



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Ontarians Often Face Steep Costs for Medical Care Outside the Province: Auditor General

(TORONTO) The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (Ministry) could do more to let Ontarians know that they are not fully covered for the cost of medical care outside the province, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says in her *2018 Annual Report*, released today.

“Ontario patients who may require emergency health services while in other countries are covered by the Ministry at pre-established rates, which represent a small percentage of the costs they actually have to pay,” Lysyk said after the report was tabled in the Legislature.

“In the last five years, on average, the Ministry reimbursed Ontarians just five cents for every dollar that they were billed by a foreign physician or hospital under the out-of-country travellers program.”

More public education is needed to make Ontarians aware that, while they may be able to receive the same level of care outside Ontario that they would be entitled to while in the province, they may be financially responsible for any difference in coverage.

While the Ministry has used its website to advise travellers to obtain additional private medical insurance, it has not focused its public education on travellers who drive across the border and who may not realize they are not covered while in the United States.

Lysyk added that even when they travel elsewhere in Canada, Ontarians may face additional costs for medical care because Ontario may not always cover the full cost of services that may need to be provided in other provinces and territories.

The findings are part of an audit on the Ministry’s International and Interprovincial Health Services. The audit found that in 2017/18, the Ministry paid a total of \$204 million for about 737,000 claims and applications under the out-of-country and out-of-province programs.

The audit also found that Ontario is a “provider” province—it provides more hospital in-patient services to people from other provinces and territories than Ontarians use in other provinces and territories. Sometimes, Ontario hospitals provide services to out-of-province patients at costs in excess of what they can bill back to the other provinces and territories. The financial extent of this is not currently tracked by all Ontario hospitals.

Lysyk noted that the Ministry has recently taken steps to improve Ontarians’ access to health services by, for example, entering into an agreement with Manitoba in May 2018 to provide funding for patient transport to and from Manitoba health facilities. It has also increased the capacity in Ontario to provide services such as bariatric surgeries (to aid in weight loss) and some mental health services that the Ministry would have approved to be delivered outside of the country.

Among the other findings of the audit:

- The Ministry has not rejected a single claim from the out-of-province physicians who directly billed the Ministry for services rendered to Ontarians in the last five years.

- The Ministry does not monitor foreign patients' financial impact on Ontario and their wait-time impact on Ontario patients.
- The Ministry can do more in planning for health services within Ontario to meet the demand of Ontario patients who may otherwise require funding approval to obtain medical services in other countries.
- The Ministry does not know whether the patients it has pre-approved to obtain health services in other provincial or foreign country facilities had good experiences with the providers, or whether it should continue sending patients to these facilities for treatment.

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Read the [Interprovincial and International Health Services](#) audit report at www.auditor.on.ca

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