



Interprovincial and International Health Services 2018 Value-for-Money Audit

Why We Did This Audit

- The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (Ministry) spent a total of \$204 million in regard to about 737,000 applications to cover claims from Ontarians who obtained certain health services outside of Ontario in 2017/18.
- Efficient administration of applications and claims of out-of-province and out-of-country health services can help eligible Ontarians better access health care while not in Ontario.
- Ontario physicians and hospitals also provide health services to patients from other parts of Canada and other countries who may require health care while in Ontario.

Why It Matters

- In accordance with the *Canada Health Act*, the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) must provide coverage for insured services to Ontarians even when they travel within Canada and internationally.
- Ontarians who travel within and outside of Canada may be reimbursed for only a portion of what they might spend on health-care services when they do not have private health insurance.

What We Found

- When Ontario hospitals provide a range of out-patient services to patients from other provinces and territories that cost anywhere from \$154 to \$3,276, they can recover only \$359 because this is the rate that has been negotiated among provinces and territories. The Province in these cases subsidizes health-care costs for patients from other parts of Canada. Not all Ontario hospitals track the extent of this shortfall.
- The Ministry reimburses Ontario patients at pre-established rates when they require emergency health services while in other countries. Between 2013/14 and 2017/18, on average, for every dollar that an Ontarian was billed by a foreign physician or hospital, the Ministry reimbursed five cents under the out-of-country travellers program.
- When Ontarians are billed by physicians at point of care in other parts of Canada, OHIP reimburses the patients up to the Ontario rate, which may be lower than the Ontario patient's actual out-of-pocket costs. For example, an Ontario patient paid \$166 for out-patient psychotherapy in Alberta, and OHIP reimbursed this patient only \$80.30. The Ministry could improve on its communication to Ontarians that it pays only up to the Ontario rate in these circumstances.
- Ontario patients needing ambulance services in other provinces pay a higher fee (for example, \$732.95 in Nova Scotia and \$650 in New Brunswick) than the \$240 that Ontario charges non-residents.
- The Ministry does not know whether the patients it has pre-approved to obtain health services such as cancer treatment and vascular procedures in other provincial or foreign-country health facilities had good experiences with the providers. Such information could guide whether it should continue providing funding to send patients to these facilities.
- The Ministry cannot readily extract information such as processing timelines and unusual patterns of claims from its databases to monitor the performance of the out-of-country and out-of-province programs.
- Claims are primarily paper-based and could take up to six to eight weeks to be processed and paid. The use of technology could make claims processing more efficient and accurate.
- The Ministry has no current information to confirm hospitals comply with its 2014 requirements that hospitals do not use public dollars to care for international patients and that services to international patients do not displace Ontarians.

Conclusions

- Ontario hospitals may not be fairly compensated for the services they provide to patients from other parts of Canada because the interprovincial hospital rates that Ontario hospitals are required to use when billing other provinces and territories do not always fully cover the costs of providing out-patient services.
- More public education is needed to help Ontarians become aware that they may be financially responsible for any difference in coverage when they acquire health services outside of Ontario.
- While the Ministry has directed Ontario hospitals to observe several principles in serving international patients, it has not monitored whether hospitals are indeed meeting these requirements, and does not ensure that international patients' use of hospital services in Ontario has not negatively affected Ontarians' timely access to health care.

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