

# UNDERSTANDING ACCESS TO TREATMENTS FOR PSORIASIS AND PSORIATIC ARTHRITIS

In Canada, universal coverage is provided to Canadian citizens and permanent residents for services that are deemed “medically necessary” (physician and hospital services, including medications administered in in-patient hospital settings).

Excluded from this framework are certain treatments and services provided outside of hospitals, like:

- Services by health care professionals that may be useful to people with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis, such as occupational therapists, social workers and counsellors
- Outpatient prescription medications
- Home phototherapy



## A NOTE ON “SPECIAL ACCESS” OR “LIMITED USE” DRUGS

On most private or public drug programs, some medications may be listed as “special access” or “limited use” drugs.

- Drugs with this designation are typically more expensive and require the fulfillment of certain criteria to be covered.
- Often, these criteria outline how severe one’s disease must be or what previous medications must have been taken before the drug plan will cover the special access or limited use medication.
- It is worthwhile to check whether a drug is limited use or special access before you purchase it. You may otherwise risk not being reimbursed if the criteria have not been met.

Be sure to tell your health care provider about any issues that you may be experiencing, like other physical or mental health issues, or if you may become pregnant or are planning a family. All of these may affect your treatment options.

## WHERE TO START

It is important that you speak with a primary care provider (e.g., family physician, nurse practitioner) to address any skin concerns you have and to get a proper diagnosis and support if you do have psoriasis.



Talk to your primary care provider to receive medical assessment of your condition. If you are not seeing a dermatologist already, ask about a referral to a dermatologist.

You must first get a referral from a primary care provider to book an appointment to see a dermatologist in Canada.

If you are also experiencing joint pain, be sure to discuss this with your health care providers as a referral to a rheumatologist may be important.

## ACCESSING MEDICATIONS OUTSIDE OF HOSPITAL

People may access medications outside of the hospital settings in various ways, including:

- Private insurance
- Public drug coverage and/or
- Paying out-of-pocket

Sometimes drug manufacturers provide patient support programs which could help with the cost of medications. Ask your doctor for information.

## ACCESSING PHOTOTHERAPY

Supervised phototherapy units are only available at select health care centres in Canada so many patients would need to travel to receive treatment, which can be a significant barrier to phototherapy.

**Home phototherapy** units are available in Canada but they can be expensive and are often not covered by private insurance. If you are wondering if home phototherapy may be an appropriate option for your psoriasis, ask your dermatologist. According to the Canada Revenue Agency, eligible medical expenses you can claim on your tax return include the amount paid to buy, use, and maintain phototherapy equipment for treating psoriasis or other skin disorders.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- The best way to know what treatments and services are covered by a private plan is to contact your private insurance plan administrator, or to view your plan online.
- If you don’t have private insurance, find out what public drug coverage plans exist in your province/territory and what their eligibility criteria is by contacting your Ministry of Health.
- Your health care team may also be able to help with access questions including your primary care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner), your specialist’s office (dermatologist, rheumatologist) and your pharmacist.

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