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\$50M cut to health care part of fiscal reality, says John Haggie

Cuts in homecare, drug plan and 'under utilized programs'

Glenn Payette · CBC News · Posted: Apr 15, 2016 9:00 PM NDT | Last Updated: April 15, 2016



Budget cuts mean a prescription for change in health care. (istock)

Cuts to homecare and the provincial drug plan will help the Department of Health trim \$50 million, and the Minister of Health says more details will be provided once staff are told what's going.

- **Full coverage: Newfoundland and Labrador Budget 2016**

"We have looked at, or tried to look at, those programs that are under utilized or have poor results, and where those have been identified, we have removed them," John Haggie told *Central Morning* on Friday.

Haggie said regional health authorities submitted proposals on where the cuts could be made.

"Some of them were approved and some were not. Now, the frontline workers will be informed of the decisions that have been made. That process, I hope, will be clued up early next week, and until then, out of respect for that process and courtesy to the people involved, I'm not going to go into any details."

Haggie did provide some generalities, saying there will be changes to the provincial drug program.

"We have altered the allowances for diabetic test strips. We were very generous in the past. If you are on a short acting insulin, you will, essentially, get what you got before. But everybody else didn't need that level of monitoring, so in line with the Canadian guidelines, we have reduced those numbers for people on longer acting insulin, or on oral medication."

There will be no harm to the patient said Haggie.

"It will save a significant amount of money over the coming years."

He said they have also removed over-the-counter drugs that had been covered by the drug plan.

"These were supplied when we were in a time of plenty, when we could do that. Tylenol, pills for aches and pains, that kind of stuff. Now we have to look at our crucial drugs, our needed drugs."

When it comes to homecare, Haggie said some people were getting a lot of hours for what was essentially cleaning and laundry.

"What we have done is cap domestic duties at two hours a day — not clinical care or specialty services."

With the province's aging population, and poor record when it comes to health, Haggie says he has to look at what is most needed.

"For example, putting a nurse practitioner into long-term care homes is far more cost effective use of staff and resources than requiring everyone to be seen by a physician once a week. And we have already started doing that."

Haggie said because of the financial realities, the province has to be smarter about spending.

With files from Central Morning Show

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