



Doyle touts expansion of state's prescription plan

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MADISON - Wisconsin residents could expect to receive up to a 40 percent discount on prescription drugs under the expansion of a state program announced Thursday by Gov. Jim Doyle.

Doyle said Wisconsin residents can enroll in the BadgerRx Gold program for an annual fee of \$25 a person or \$75 for a family of four.

Savings will start immediately at more than 700 of Wisconsin's 880 pharmacies participating in the program.

The 1.1 million Wisconsin residents who lack prescription drug coverage, those who have coverage with high co-payments or those enrolled in plans that do not cover some drugs would benefit the most. People of all ages and incomes can apply.

Doyle said the program is an expansion of one already in place under which the state partners with Madison-based Navitus Health Solutions to provide prescription drugs for state employees and small businesses. He said that program saved the state \$25 million in 2004.

The company's doctors and pharmacists pick out the most effective prescription drugs for different ailments. Pharmacies agree to provide discounts and drug manufacturers offer rebates on those medications. The state's purchasing pool - so far about 465,000 state and private employees take part - allows the company to demand deeper discounts.

Doyle and Navitus CEO Allan Zimmerman emphasized the program differed from traditional prescription drug discount cards. They said the program offers the most effective drugs, not simply the cheapest, and it's more convenient because almost every Wisconsin pharmacy is

taking part. To get a discount, members need to show their BadgerRx Gold cards.

The expansion will not cost the state any money and does not require legislative approval, Doyle said. He said he believed the program was the first of its kind in the United States, where drug costs have skyrocketed over the last several years.

"When a person walks into a pharmacy in Wisconsin, they aren't walking in by themselves anymore," Doyle said. "They'll be walking in with the force of all of the state employees and all of the state purchasing power.

"It drives not only cost down, but it also really is focused on quality as well."

The company provided examples of potential savings:

- A 40-year-old with high blood pressure would pay \$18.92 for a monthly supply of Lisinopril, about half the cost of paying for the drug outside the program.
- A 30-year-old with anxiety disorder would pay \$33 a month, instead of \$92, for Desogen.
- A 55-year-old with high cholesterol could save \$21 per month on Lovastatin.

"BadgerRx Gold is Wisconsin's answer to the high cost of prescription drugs," Zimmerman said.

Darlene Mednick, a Navitus vice president, said more than 1,000 different drugs are included in the program of all therapeutic classes.

She offered an example of why it makes sense to use more effective drugs even if they are more expensive. The asthma medicine in the program isn't the cheapest, but people will have to use it less often, will not have to use multiple inhalers and will see fewer visits to the emergency room as a result.

The expansion, first sketched out by Doyle in his annual State of the State address in January, is the governor's latest attempt to stem the tide of rising drug costs. Earlier in his term, he allowed Wisconsin

residents to order prescription drugs over the Internet through Canadian pharmacies.

AARP Wisconsin, which helped the governor develop the program, hailed Thursday's announcement as another option for people struggling with high prescription drug costs.

"There's a low cost to get into the program so people may find that they save the cost of entry in filling that first prescription," said Gail Sumi, a spokeswoman. "They need to look closely at the drugs they are taking and compare prices."