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Health Care

Colorado wins FDA approval for Canadian drug importation plan after years of effort



THINKSTOCK



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Story Highlights

- Colorado secured FDA approval for its Canadian Drug Importation Plan on Monday.
- The state estimates the program will save Coloradans \$46 million over three years.
- AdiraMedica and Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Safety will handle importation and distribution.

Colorado has passed a major milestone in its efforts to reduce the price of drugs by importing pharmaceuticals from Canada. State officials announced Monday that they had secured approval from the [Food and Drug Administration](#) for their Canadian Drug Importation Plan.

The program has been in the works since the passage of [a 2019 law](#) that directed the state to establish a pharmaceutical supply chain with Canada. The Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing [first submitted its application to the FDA in 2022](#).

The state's next step is to negotiate with pharmaceutical manufacturers to procure its supply of eligible drugs. HCPF estimates the program will be operational in 2027, depending on the willingness of drug manufacturers to participate in the program.

“This [FDA](#) approval for Colorado’s drug importation program has been a long time coming. Now it is time for drug manufacturers to engage with the State, remove the prohibitions they have put on Canadian manufacturers and be part of the prescription drug affordability solution,” HCPF Executive Director Gretchen Hammer said in a news release.

A 2022 HCPF analysis had found that importation could save Coloradans between \$53 million and \$88 million a year in prescription drug costs, [according to previous DBJ reporting](#). But a HCPF-commissioned actuarial cost-savings analysis in 2024 produced a more conservative estimate of \$46.2 million in combined savings over the program's first three years, which officials touted on Monday.

"The program's conservative analysis assumes we may have modest initial uptake by insurers in program participation, growing each year, hence the increased amount of savings over time (e.g. \$5M in savings in year one; \$16.6M in year two; increasing to almost \$25M by year three)," HCPF spokesman Marc Williams told The DBJ.

HCPF said it analyzed thousands of drugs eligible for importation before landing on [20 drugs and dosages](#). The drugs treat a variety of conditions, including blood clots, cystic fibrosis, cancer, Type 2 diabetes, HIV, psoriatic arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Savings range from 18% to 68%.

Under the program, HCPF projects that a 1 mg prescription for the weight-loss drug Ozempic would drop from \$268 to \$137.50 in 2027. Drugs that cannot be included in the program include controlled substances like Vicodin or Percocet and biologic drugs like insulin.

After a bidding process to secure vendors, the state announced three partners in August 2022. Then, in November 2025, HCPF [terminated its contract with Premier Pharmaceuticals](#), the planned importer and distributor. Williams said the contract was terminated to consolidate the importation supply chain into a single contractor.

Currently, AdiraMedica, a U.S. wholesaler, and its Canadian subsidiary would act as the foreign seller and handle the importation, testing, relabeling and distribution of the drugs to Colorado pharmacies.

"This increased our operational efficiency and reduced costs to HCPF and the state during this time of state budget constraints," Williams said.

Separately, Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Safety would be responsible for the FDA-required adverse event reporting and consumer inquiries.

In 2021, Gov. Jared Polis signed into law an expansion of the drug importing program to include Australia and countries in the European Union.

Florida, which received FDA approval to import drugs from Canada in 2024, has still not imported a single unit of medication after spending \$132 million on its efforts, according to industry group The Partnership for Safe Medications.

"Colorado is now poised to repeat Florida's failed attempt," PSM Executive Director Shabbir Imber Safdar said in a Monday statement.

This article has been updated to include information about the 2024 cost-savings analysis and the terminated contract with Premier Pharmaceuticals.

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