

## Governor tackles high drug prices

By Ciara Varone, Daily Sun Senior Writer Feb 21, 2019



Gov. Ron DeSantis announces a health care initiative Wednesday at Savannah Center. The proposed plan would work to import cheaper prescription drugs from Canada.

Max Gersh, Daily Sun

To combat escalating prescription prices, Florida's governor is looking to America's northern neighbor. Gov. Ron DeSantis, making his first visit to The Villages since taking office, announced Wednesday at Savannah Center that he's planning to create a program to import cheaper Food and Drug Administration-approved prescription drugs from Canada, where he said the same medications are sold at prices up to 75 percent lower than in the U.S. "Florida's really going to be on the forefront here really leading, and I think our people are going to be much better for it," DeSantis said. He said he will work with the Trump administration and the Florida Legislature to develop the program.

Dr. Jeff Lowenkron, chief medical officer for The Villages Health, said DeSantis' initiative makes sense, as the cheaper medications available in other countries are typically the same ones offered here by the same companies.

"They just cost more (here)," he said. "Anything that seeks to give people relief from costs to get care is a good thing."

David Lee, of the Village of Tamarind Grove, praised the governor's plan and his alignment with Trump.

"It's well overdue," he said. "The prescription drugs in this country are just ridiculous. Health care is just ridiculous."

DeSantis said the idea sprang from the Medicare Modernization Act that Congress passed in 2003 that allows U.S. wholesalers and pharmacists to import prescription drugs from Canada with authorization from the Department of Health and Human Services.

"Sixteen years this has been on the books, and yet it has never been put into practice," DeSantis said. "I am ready to act."

DeSantis credited Florida House Speaker José Oliva with initially looking for ways to reduce health care costs for the state, businesses and residents.

"There are people who worked their entire lives and set themselves up, and they are one major disease away from being bankrupt," Oliva said.

President Donald Trump expressed his support for the provision in phone calls earlier this week, DeSantis told the packed house in the Savannah Center, many of whom wore Trump shirts or hats.

"He's not only supportive, he's enthusiastic," DeSantis said.

Even if the drugs are 30 to 40 percent cheaper, it will make a huge difference, he said.

"It's a big deal," DeSantis said. "This is not like I'm giving you a coupon to save 2 percent."

And other plans are in the works to drive down costs.

"This is just one part of what we hope to do to be able to bring some sanity to our health care system," DeSantis said.

Mary Mayhew, secretary of the Agency for Health Care Administration, praised DeSantis for his work to improve the future of health care for residents.

“The mission of ... this critically important agency is to make sure Floridians have access to the highest quality and most affordable health care in the country,” she said. “I am confident that with Gov. DeSantis’ leadership, his vision and his willingness to be decisive and to take bold action, we can accomplish that mission.”

DeSantis, who campaigned in The Villages in 2018 and made a visit to the community in December after his narrow victory over Andrew Gillum, thanked those in attendance for their support. Sumter County led the state in voter turnout in November with 7 of 10 Villagers casting their vote for DeSantis.

“I also want to say, personally, I really appreciate all that the folks at The Villages did for me, to support me, and how nice you were to my wife, Casey,” he said.

John Temple, chairman of the Sumter County Republican Executive Committee, said he was impressed by DeSantis’ direction.

“Our leadership at our state level is not just worrying about lowering the state’s budget, but also the citizens,” he said. “What a great impact for our families in Sumter County and our retirees as well.”

Terry Soderquist, of the Village Alhambra, said prescription drug prices are a concern for almost every senior.

“I wonder why it hasn’t been done before,” she said. “I’m not sure how this process is going to work, but I hope that it takes effect.”

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