

https://www.thestar.com/politics/ontario-considers-expanding-scopes-of-practice-for-health-professionals/article_10141b2a-d8d9-5bd3-a9aa-c11cdc486f20.html

POLITICS

Ontario considers expanding scopes of practice for health professionals

The government says it is consulting on proposed changes including granting psychologists with specialized training and education in psychopharmacology the authority to prescribe certain medications to manage mental health conditions, as well as to order some diagnostic tests.

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Health Minister Sylvia Jones speaks during question period in the Ontario legislature on May 13, 2025.

THE CANADIAN PRESS/Cole Burston

By Allison Jones The Canadian Press

TORONTO - Ontario is looking at giving several types of health professionals more authority, including allowing psychologists to prescribe anti-depressants and letting pharmacists administer strep throat tests, but the province's doctors are pushing back.

Health Minister Sylvia Jones said in a statement that expanding the scopes of practice for health professionals will ease pressures on other parts of the system, such as primary care.

“Across our province, qualified health-care professionals are ready to contribute more to their communities, ensuring doctors’ offices and emergency departments are available for those who truly need them,” she wrote.

“By working to expand scopes of practice for additional professions, we are building on our progress to make it faster and easier for families to access the care they need, when and where they need it.”

However, the Ontario Medical Association wrote in a statement that allowing non-physicians to perform complex procedures or prescribe powerful medicines puts patients at risk.

“Physicians train for years to assess, diagnose, and manage care,” the association wrote.

“Expanding scope of practice for other health-care professionals without doctors involved puts patients at risk. Patients deserve more than a quick fix.”

The government is now consulting on the proposed changes, including granting psychologists with advanced education and who hold a postdoctoral master of science degree in clinical psychopharmacology the authority to prescribe certain medications, such as anti-depressants, to manage mental health conditions.

As well, the province is considering allowing the same psychologists to order and interpret some lab tests such as bloodwork and urinalysis to support drug monitoring.

Psychologists welcomed the proposal, with their association calling it a “milestone” in improving mental health care.

“By integrating therapy and medication management within the scope of psychological practice, this advancement will expand access, reduce delays and foster deeper collaboration with family physicians and nurse practitioners,” Ontario Psychological Association CEO Richard Morrison wrote in a statement.

Camille Quenneville, the CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association’s Ontario division, said in a statement that the scope expansion for psychologists “has the potential to significantly improve access” to mental health care.

“We look forward to participating in these consultations to offer our expertise and ensure that the training, education and compensation provided for these additional responsibilities are appropriately considered,” Quenneville wrote in a statement.

The province is also looking at allowing denturists and chiropodists to order X-rays and operate an X-ray machine, and allowing dental hygienists to order X-rays. Speech-language pathologists could also be allowed to order X-rays for swallowing studies and to order diagnostic ultrasounds.

Ontario is considering authorizing physiotherapists to order MRIs and diagnostic ultrasounds and is also asking for feedback on which X-rays physiotherapists should be allowed to order, and if they should be allowed to order CT scans.

Chiropractors could be allowed to order diagnostic ultrasounds, MRIs and CT scans.

Optometrists are also being considered for a scope expansion, with a possibility they could be allowed to perform minor surgical procedures in office, including laser therapy to manage cataracts and glaucoma.

The government has already expanded pharmacists’ scope of practice several times and is now looking at a new round, to perform some point-of-care tests such as strep throat testing.

The province has directed the Ontario College of Pharmacists to develop regulatory changes that would allow pharmacists to administer more publicly funded vaccines including RSV, pertussis, tetanus, diphtheria and shingles.

As well, pharmacists would be able to assess and prescribe for 14 more minor ailments, including sore throat, fungal nail infections, head lice and warts.

The government in early 2023 granted pharmacists the ability to assess and treat 13 minor ailments, including pink eye, hemorrhoids and urinary tract infections. In the fall of that year six more were added to the list, including acne, canker sores and yeast infections.

When the Progressive Conservatives first proposed the 14 additional ailments last year, the Ontario Medical Association pushed back, saying “pharmacists are not doctors.”

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