

HEALTH CARE: ONTARIO

Diseases poorly managed, report says

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TORONTO -- Ontario is doing a "poor" job of managing chronic disease, and nearly 8,000 lives could be saved annually if the province did a better job of testing, treating and monitoring patients with maladies such as diabetes and heart disease, a report released yesterday suggests.

Slightly less than half of diabetics in Ontario have their blood sugar under control, while only 28 per cent of patients with diabetes and high blood pressure have their blood pressure under control, the Ontario Health Quality Council said in its report.

As well, only one in three patients with coronary-artery disease received all three drugs - Aspirin, beta-blockers and cholesterol-reducing medications - recommended to prevent their vessels from clogging.

"More disturbingly, women are far less likely than men to be recommended the right medications or to meet their targets for blood-pressure control," said council chairman Ray Hession.

"Staggering? Yes. Particularly given that we already know a great deal about the lifestyle changes that would prevent chronic disease."

Ontario needs a provincewide electronic health records system to better monitor and treat these patients, Mr. Hession said.

But the government has yet to release a plan with a budget and targets to "get us from where we are to where it's widely accepted we ought to be," he added. "In the absence of that, it doesn't matter what we say about when it's going to happen," he said. A spokeswoman for Health Minister George Smitherman pointed out that the province has promised to have electronic health records by 2015 and has spent millions of dollars toward helping patients with chronic diseases, which affect one in three Canadians.

In the March budget, the province earmarked \$47-million this year for electronic health projects, including a registry to help diabetics manage their disease with their health-care provider, said Laurel Ostfield.

"While we acknowledge there's definitely work to do, we are targeting diabetes as a priority because we want to be able to take the lessons that we learned and apply it to other chronic diseases as we go forward," she said.

The province is moving too slowly when it comes to creating a system where health records could be shared electronically by health-care providers to deliver better care, said NDP health critic France G  linas.

"If the political will was there, we could change very quickly," she said from Sudbury.

The gap

A study released yesterday shows that many Ontarians with diabetes and heart disease are not receiving the recommended drugs and tests. As a result, people are needlessly dying.

DIABETES

Blood sugar test (at least twice in past year): 48%

Blockers/inhibitors recommended: 53%

Foot exam in past two years: 27%

Eye exam in past two years: 42%

All diabetes drugs and tests completed: 5.5%

HEART DISEASE

Aspirin recommended: 76%

Beta blocker recommended: 62%

Statin recommended: 64%

All heart disease drugs completed: 35%

SOURCE: ONTARIO HEALTH QUALITY COUNCIL