

The State of Texas  
House of Representatives



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## State Representative Hochberg Wants to Help Texans Save Money on Prescription Drugs

State Rep. Scott Hochberg has introduced legislation to help Texans facing hefty bills for their prescription drugs.

This morning, Hochberg filed House Bill 173, which sets up a program to have the state of Texas license Canadian pharmacies that will sell drugs to Texas citizens at prices far lower than those paid within the United States. The licensing process will ensure that the drugs are safe and handled properly.

"Prescription drugs are very expensive," Hochberg said, "and often it's those who can least afford them who must have them. Seniors and others on fixed incomes are forced to make daily choices between their prescription drugs or food or electricity. When the same drugs are available at much lower prices in other countries, it's wrong for Texans to face these choices.

"Canada has a strong system of licensing and regulation, and we can add to that with our own standards and additional requirements for safe packaging and shipping. Texans should not have to resort to unregulated Internet pharmacies selling what could be counterfeit drugs."

Hochberg hopes to encourage local pharmacists to use this program by offering it as a service to their customers. Pharmacists could place orders on behalf of their customers and check for any possible interactions with medications the customers are already taking. "I look forward to input from the Texas Pharmacy Association and from individual pharmacists on the best ways to combine cost savings with safety."

Texans could potentially realize huge savings on prescription drugs commonly prescribed for a variety of illnesses. Examples are 32 per cent savings on Fosamax, prescribed for osteoporosis; 45 per cent for Lipitor for high cholesterol; 55 per cent on Celebrex, a pain reliever often prescribed for arthritis; and 75 per cent on Premarin, used to relieve menopausal symptoms.

Under H.B. 173, Canadian pharmacies would apply to sell specific prescription medicines to Texans. They must be medicines which are prescribed for long-term use; are approved by Health Canada for sale in Canada; are either manufactured in the United States or manufactured in other countries but have an equivalent approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for sale in America; and require no special handling, such as refrigeration.

The Texas State Board of Pharmacy would select those meeting Texas and Canadian pharmacy licensing standards for on-site inspection. The Board would also adopt additional requirements to assure that safety is maintained through the pharmacy's shipping process. The shipping must be from that pharmacy—the pharmacy cannot have the orders filled from an offshore location. The pharmacies will be randomly inspected to make sure they are maintaining quality and will be inspected annually prior to renewal of their agreement with the state.

The pharmacies that rate most highly on the inspection process will be allowed to submit pricing information available through a toll-free telephone number and for posting on a website operated by the state of Texas. Prices must be guaranteed for a month at a time.

Texans would be able to order the medications directly from the Canadian pharmacies at the posted prices. Texas pharmacies that wish to participate in the program on behalf of their customers would be able to do so.

Hochberg based his plan on successful programs in Minnesota and Wisconsin.