



James M. Jeffords Center's  
*Vermont Legislative Research Service*  
D

**Access to Prescription Drugs for Rural Seniors and Chronic Care Individuals**

Increasing access to prescription drugs is an issue in many rural areas. The winter weather conditions make this problem even more pressing for Vermonters. These problems combined with current financial crisis make obtaining prescriptions very difficult for seniors and chronic care individuals in Vermont. Several safe, cost effective ways to bring prescription medications to those individuals and others is through ordering the medication online. One state has set up a websites for their citizens to purchase medication. Several corporations are now allowing for home delivery of many prescriptions.<sup>1</sup> These methods can be more cost efficient because insurance companies, recently, have been more lenient on mail order companies than traditional pharmacies. Most mail order companies are allowed to distribute 90 day supplies of prescriptions and offer low shipping costs.<sup>2</sup> Safety isn't compromised because the companies still need a doctor's prescription and full medical history before sending you medication. Recently "Telehealth" centers, which provide pharmacy related care utilizing the

Pharmacy came up with a temperature controlled, security code delivery bag.<sup>5</sup> Minnesota has created a website that allows residents to purchase prescription medication over the internet (the website address is <http://www.state.mn.us/portal/mn/jsp/home.do?agency=Rx>). Another method is mail order, which allows for quick refills and usually larger orders, e.g., three months of pills instead of only one month.<sup>6</sup> The increase in the utilization of mail order, however, has a tradeoff—it threatens the already dwindling number of traditional pharmacies. Recently “more health plans move to mandatory mail order,” instead of traditional pharmacies, “for certain kinds of... maintenance drugs that are taken regularly to help people manage chronic conditions like high cholesterol, arthritis or heart disease.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Mail Order**

There are many retailers that will deliver medication like, Wal Mart, RxAmerica, and other traditional pharmacies. Wal Mart now offers “a 90 day supply of approximately 300 generic prescriptions for \$10 each via mail delivery” in order to combat rising health care costs and mobility problems.<sup>8</sup> Wal Mart’s program also has “no membership and no enrollment fees.”<sup>9</sup> Vermont is one of 22 states that can already take advantage of this program.

including CVS and Riteaid.<sup>14</sup> Costco is also starting to provide home delivery and 90 day supplies for certain insurance carriers.<sup>15</sup>

### **Telehealth**

Several of the companies that home deliver are also beginning to offer telepharmacy options. Telepharmacy, “uses state of the art telecommunications so pharmacists can... review prescriptions, double check fill accuracy and consult with patients about their drug interactions and other health matters.”<sup>16</sup> North Dakota has utilized this method and is home to 33 of the about 200 telepharmacy locations in the United States. North Dakota estimates that “40,000 rural citizens have had their pharmacy services restored, retained, or established through telepharmacy.”<sup>17</sup> The Office for the Advancement of Telehealth (OAT) “promotes the use of telehealth technologies for health care delivery, education, and health information services... to assure quality health care for underserved, vulnerable, and special needs populations.”<sup>18</sup> OAT is a part of the “Office of Rural Health Policy, located within the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.”<sup>19</sup> OAT provides several grants programs to help fund projects for increasing telehealth opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

There are a number of approaches to insure that elderly citizens are capable of gaining access to their prescription drugs, including setting up a stat003Tj/TT11Tf(OTd(provides)Tj/C2\_11Tf0Tc3.49r03TjnAVC

toare

a

n

2