



NON-INSURED HEALTH BENEFITS (NIHB) PROGRAM: MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT (MS&E) BENEFITS

Questions and Answers - Registered Nurses as prescribers/recommenders of select MS&E benefits

1. Why registered nurses are now allowed to “prescribe” or “recommend” MS&E items under the NIHB Program?

The Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Program requires confirmation of a client’s medical need by a recognized health care professional in order to provide coverage for medically necessary items and services. Traditionally, this authorization has been restricted to physicians, nurse practitioners and other health care professionals that have the authority to prescribe in their scope of practice.

Benefit programs, including NIHB, establish policies and criteria for funding of benefits. As registered nurses (RN) are the primary providers of health care for many First Nations and Inuit clients, NIHB now allows RNs to prescribe or recommend coverage for selected medical equipment and supplies. These are items where a prescription is not legally required for a provider (e.g. pharmacist) to dispense the item. Therefore, NIHB can accept either a “prescription” or “recommendation” from a health care professional to confirm that the item is medically necessary for the client, and can be covered under the NIHB.

Allowing RNs to authorize access to certain medical equipment and supplies under the NIHB Program will improve client care and access. This change of policy is also consistent with other benefit programs, such as Veterans Affairs Canada, that has this type of policy in place.

This policy applies to all RNs in all practice settings, including on and off reserve, and nurses working in home care. Moving forward, this policy will be expanded to include other health professionals, including occupational therapists (OT), physiotherapists (PT), and respiratory therapists (RT), for particular appropriate benefits.

2. Can all RNs prescribe/recommend MS&E under the NIHB Program?

As a general policy, NIHB Program will now accept a prescription or recommendation from a RN to confirm a client’s medical need for an MS&E item (as required by the Program in order to provide coverage).

Whether an individual RN can prescribe an MS&E item depends on their scope of practice as defined by their licensing body (College or Association depending on the province or territory).

Whether an RN can recommend an MS&E item is based on their own professional judgement, with consideration to their level of competence, stream of practice, practice setting, and their employer’s policies.

3. When does this policy change come into effect?

This policy change is effective as of December 17, 2018, in all provinces and territories.

4. Are a prescription and a recommendation meant to be interchangeable?

No, these words are not meant to be interchangeable.

In some jurisdictions, RNs have legislated prescribing rights under certain conditions and for certain items. For example, in Quebec, RNs can prescribe wound care products and barriers; and in some provinces, Nurse Specialized in Wound, Ostomy and Continence are allowed to prescribe ostomy, wound care and incontinence items. The NIHB Program recognizes these prescribing rights and now accepts prescriptions from RNs as confirmation of medical needs.

The NIHB Program also recognizes that, within their scope of practice, RNs and other health care professionals have the competency, skill and knowledge to “recommend” certain medical equipment and supplies (e.g. items such as diapers from a registered nurse, or hearing aids from a hearing instrument practitioner). These are items where a prescription is not legally required for a provider to dispense the item, so NIHB can accept a recommendation instead.



5. What are the NIHB MS&E items which RNs can prescribe/recommend?

Items that an RN can prescribe/recommend include certain bathing and toileting aids, dressing aids, feeding aids, transfer aids, walking aids, incontinence, ostomy and catheter supplies, wound care supplies and breast prostheses. The detailed list of items an RN may prescribe/recommend can be found in the Prescriber column of the [NIHB MS&E Benefit Lists](#).

For more information on the MS&E policy and coverage and eligibility criteria please consult the [Guide for Medical Supplies and Equipment Benefits](#).

6. What information is the RN required to provide when prescribing/recommending MS&E under the NIHB Program?

A RN must provide the following information:

- the client's full given name and surname, date of birth, and client identification number when available;
- the item being prescribed/recommended, including applicable details such as make/model, quantity, frequency, and size (the height and weight of the client if applicable);
- the RN's printed name, professional designation and title, and hand-written signature;
- the RN's provincial/territorial licence number;
- the prescription/recommendation should be dated and signed within the past 12 months; and
- the RN's phone number and email.

7. How do I find out more information on this and related issues?

General NIHB Program information can be found online at www.canada.ca/nihb. To find MS&E policies and benefit lists, navigate to 'Benefits and Services', 'Medical Supplies and Equipment'.

If you have further questions and/or concerns, please contact your respective NIHB Regional Office. Their contact information can be found online at <https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-services-canada/corporate/contact-us-first-nations-inuit-health/non-insured-health-benefits.html>