

## **MINISTRY OF HEALTH**

### **THE PRESCRIPTION FEE POLICY**

**MARCH 2019**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

In the budget speech for the fiscal year 2019, the Seychelles Minister of Finance, Trade, Investment and Economic Planning (MFTIEP) announced that the Government would introduce a prescription charge of SCR25 in the first quarter of 2019. The budget speech affirmed that the initiative is aimed at “sustaining the investment in the future” and getting everybody “to start taking care of their own health.”

Specifically, the speech said the following

“Mr. Speaker, for the past 40 years there has been no contribution from any Seychellois for the health services. However, over the past 10 years the budget for the health sector has increased from SR 315.2 million to SR 1.02 billion. Mr. Speaker, as a country we will need to re-think how we continue to sustain such an investment in the future. Everybody will need to start to take care of their own health. Therefore, the time has come for Government to charge a prescription fee of only SR 25. Mr. Speaker, the medicine will still be available free of charge. The children under the age of 18 years, full time students, elderly and patient with chronic diseases will be exempt from this Prescription fee. This will be implemented in the first quarter of 2019.”

#### **2.0 Arguments in Favour of Prescription Charges**

Health care costs keep rising, people need to be aware of these costs and by becoming aware it is hoped they will take more responsibility for their own care and make more efforts at prevention.

There is an assumption of a revenue generation agenda associated with the imposition of any fee. However, the amount of revenue expected from the prescription fee is a very small fraction of the total health budget.

### **3.0 APPLICATION OF THE PRESCRIPTION CHARGE IN SEYCHELLES**

The background and the expectations of the prescription charge have been presented above. In order to implement the announced Seychelles model, the Ministry of Health will apply the following:

#### **A. Exemption criteria.**

The following categories of patients will be exempted from the prescription charge. **The exemptions do not apply for persons who are not covered by schemes intended for citizens of Seychelles.**

1. Age related exemptions
  - Children under the age of 18 years
  - Persons over the age of 63
2. Short term exemptions
  - Full-time students (proof required from Institution)
  - Pregnant women
  - Inpatients of all ages
3. Long-term exemptions.
  - Chronic illnesses

A person will qualify for long term exemption from prescription charges (Chronic illnesses), when, in the Consultant's/Medical Officer's view, that person has a (chronic) long-term health condition.

**B. Definitions of chronic conditions to be used for the application of the prescription fee policy. Any of these definitions are valid.**

- *A condition that cannot at present be cured, but can be controlled through medication and other therapies and may limit people's ability to cope with day to day activities (Department of Health; Long Term Conditions Programme).*
- *A chronic disease is one lasting 3 months or more. (US National Center for Health Statistics)*
- *Chronic diseases are generally characterized by uncertain aetiology, multiple risk factors, a long latency period, a prolonged course of illness, non-contagious origin, functional impairment or disability, and in most cases, incurability. (US Center for Disease Control and Prevention)*
- *Health problems that require ongoing management over a period of years or decades. (World Health Organisation)*

**C. Determination of exemption from charges**

The recommendation for long term exemption (Chronic conditions) or other categories of exemption which are not evident from the prescription itself (i.e. exemptions that are not age-related) will be made by the **Medical Officer** responsible for the person's care.

**D. Duration of exemption**

The duration of the exemption will be for as long as the person has the condition or is in the situation for which exemption was given.

## **E. Non-exemption criteria**

If a person with a chronic condition visits the doctor and is prescribed a medication not directly related to the chronic condition, there will be a charge.

## **F. Guidelines for implementation**

The options and way in which this Policy will be implemented must:

- Not deter persons from obtaining medication which is important for their health or to relieve suffering
- Be practicable, fair and simple to deliver
- Contribute to the efficient and effective provision and use of health services
- Maintain confidentiality.

## **G. Guidance to Health Professionals and Public**

The new system will be supported by clear and effective guidance for health professionals and for the public.

## **4.0 Conclusion**

The application of the prescription fee policy is entirely new for the modern public health sector of Seychelles. Teething problems are expected in the early stages of implementation, as with everything else, but the system will be set in such a way as to be as equitable, fair, clear, consistent and as simple to manage as possible for all concerned and any teething problem which emerges will be quickly and effectively addressed. The Ministry will monitor implementation to ensure that the policy does not have any undesired negative effects and further advise government if there are such undesired effects.

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - PRESCRIPTION FEE**

### **1. Why introduce the prescription fee? We've never paid before why now?**

The number and types of chronic and acute diseases are increasingly rising and so are the costs associated with prevention, treatment and care.

In order to continue providing good quality care, we need to better manage the costs of health care.

Through the prescription fee, we aim to raise awareness of the overall health care costs which will hopefully encourage more prevention.

### **2. What's the goal?**

The goal is to begin to create a sense of personal responsibility of the citizens towards their own health and health care and eventually sustain that sense of personal responsibility.

### **3. Who will benefit from it?**

When we all become more responsible for our own health, the whole of society benefits.

Money collected as a result of the fee will go to the consolidated fund where it will be re-distributed by Government.

### **4. When will I need to pay this fee?**

You will pay the fee after you have seen a doctor and the doctor has determined that you personally and the condition for which you were seen on that particular day are not among the categories that are exempted from payment of the fee.

## 5. Will this apply to everyone?

The fee will not apply for persons who:

- Are Less than 18 years old
- Are More than 63 years old
- Are Over 18 years old but in full time training and are not earning a salary
- Are pregnant
- Have chronic diseases
- Are seen for an emergency according to the criteria set by the Ministry of Health

## 6. What if I don't have the money to pay?

Like for any other payable good or service, if you do not have the money to pay, you will not have the service or the good. If you are an emergency, (or belong to the other exemptible categories) you will be exempted from payment. The Agency for Social Protection provides financial support to persons who are genuinely in need of support.

## 7. How is this bringing about long term benefits?

The long term benefit will be a more responsible and engaged citizenry that is committed to take responsibility for its own health and health care.

## 8. When will this take effect?

The Prescription fee will take effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2019 after all the necessary mechanisms for collection of the fee have been put in place.

## 9. How will payments be processed?

There will be designated points in the health centres and other service points at which the payments will be made. In larger service areas, cashiers will be

stationed for revenue collection. In smaller service areas, selected staff will be trained and assigned that responsibility.

**10. For those who do not have to pay, will not paying always be the case?**

As long as the condition for which you are seen is one of the categories that are exempted, you will not have to pay. However, if a person with a chronic disease sees a doctor for a condition that has nothing to do with his chronic disease, he/she should be paying the prescription fee.

**11. How do I get more information?**

For now you can have more information by emailing [ps@moh.gov.sc](mailto:ps@moh.gov.sc)