

Q3 2026 MD Snapshot-Prescribing Companion:

Peptide Drugs

Prescribing Resource

Physician Prescribing Practices (PPP) Program
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Introduction

CPSA's Physician Prescribing Practices (PPP) program provides physicians with resources and tools that support safe and informed prescribing practices.

The quarterly MD Snapshot-Prescribing reports allow physicians to review individualized summaries of their prescribing trends, and the prescribing companions offer additional prescribing guidance.

Questions? For inquiries or feedback, please contact us at AIR.Inquiries@cpsa.ab.ca.

Overview

There is significant public, media and commercial interest in peptide drug therapeutics in Canada. A major regulatory development since April 2025 was the enforcement by Health Canada against the sale of unauthorized injectable peptide drugs.^{1,2,3,4} Another major topic of interest involves the growing rate of prescribing of glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) medications.⁵ Furthermore, in April 2026, Health Canada became the first G7 country to approve a generic version of the GLP-1 receptor agonist semaglutide, which is expected to further increase the prescribing of this medication going forward.⁶ These examples underscore why physicians need to stay informed about this group of health products.

This prescribing companion provides an overview of peptide drugs — authorized and unauthorized by Health Canada — and the legal and regulatory factors to consider when prescribing or counselling about them.

What are peptide drugs?

Biochemically, peptides are molecules comprising short chains of amino acids joined by covalent chemical bonds. Biologically and pharmaceutically, this encompasses a wide range of health products and medicinal drugs, with a wide range of therapeutic effects as discussed below. However, not all peptide drugs are authorized by Health Canada for human use in Canada.

Regulation of Health Products in Canada

Health Canada regulates drugs, medical devices and natural health products. Companies must submit requisite information to Health Canada and obtain authorization before selling a health product in Canada.⁷ As outlined in an overview of the regulation of health products published by the Government of Canada, a product can only be authorized for sale if Health Canada is satisfied that:

- “its benefits outweigh its risks
- the evidence supports its health claims
- the risks and uncertainties can be managed”.⁷

Authorized medications can be recognized by the eight-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN) on their labels, while authorized natural health products are identified with an eight-digit Natural Product Number (NPN).^{8,9}

Overall, Health Canada promotes and enforces compliance with federal laws and regulations to help ensure that companies meet Canadian safety and quality standards. Before a health product can be legally sold in Canada, it must meet the requirements of the [Food and Drugs Act](#) and its [Food and Drug Regulations](#). Companies must obtain licenses for product manufacturing, packaging, testing, importing, distributing and wholesaling health products.⁷ Some health products, including drugs, must be tested in humans before they can be authorized for sale; for these products, companies must provide clinical trial evidence as part of their approval application.⁷

PART I – Unauthorized peptides*

***Please note:** The information provided in this resource is for educational purposes only. CPSA does not endorse any of the unauthorized drugs, substances or health products mentioned in this article.

Case scenario: what would you do?

Patient Y is an active 27-year-old male whom you have followed in your practice for several years now. He is visiting you for a routine check-up and tells you that he has had a few knee and shoulder injuries this past year that have set him back from playing competitive ice hockey.

He mentions that he is taking some drugs that he bought online from a “legit” Canadian peptide company. He heard from a teammate that these drugs will help with soft tissue repair and speed up injury recovery, which he is very excited about. In fact, he tells you that he is already feeling great, although he is a little concerned that they may not be 100% safe in the long run.

You ask him for the names of these drugs, and he shows you photo snapshots from his phone of the vials: one is BPC-157 and the other is TB-500 – both vials have “Research Use Only” on their labels.

Questions to consider:

- What would you advise your patient regarding these peptide products?
- What are the health concerns with taking these peptides?
- What are the legislative and regulatory issues to consider?

Health products not authorized by Health Canada have not undergone its assessment for safety, efficacy and quality. **Table 1** lists examples of injectable peptide drugs that are not authorized for sale in Canada.

Table 1. Examples of unauthorized injectable peptide drugs in Canada*

Category	Peptide(s)**	Commonly marketed for***
Growth Hormone Secretagogues or Products	CJC-1295, GHRP-2, GHRP-6, Hexarelin, Ipamorelin, Sermorelin, HGH, HGH fragment	Muscle growth, fat loss, anti-aging
Tissue Repair & Healing	BPC-157, TB-500, ARA-290, LL-37, KPV, GHK-Cu	Injury recovery, soft tissue healing, anti-inflammation, management of neuropathic pain
Cognitive	Selank, Semax, DSIP, Pinealon, Cortagen	Memory, anxiety, sleep regulation, cognitive enhancement
Weight Loss/ Metabolic	AOD9604, Retatrutide, GLP-1 (7-37)	Weight loss, fat burning
Pigmentation/ Cosmetic	Melanotan I, Melanotan II, GHK-Cu, Pal-GHK	Tanning, skin rejuvenation
Hormonal/ Reproductive	Gonadorelin, Kisspeptin, Bremelanotide	Fertility, libido
Immune/Thymic	Thymosin Alpha-1	Immune modulation

* Unauthorized means the product has not been authorized by Health Canada for sale.

**List is not all-inclusive. Product list is based on a public advisory by Health Canada: [Unauthorized injectable peptide drugs seized and sold by Canada Peptide may pose serious health risks - Canada.ca](#)

***Marketing claims found through using generative AI tool search functions and Internet search engines, and are based on promotions discovered online. These claims are not indicative of effectiveness or Health Canada approval.

Risks associated with unauthorized injectable peptide drugs

Since early 2025, Health Canada has issued several public advisories warning about unauthorized injectable peptide drugs and the possible serious adverse health effects associated with using them. These adverse health effects include infections, allergic reactions, liver or kidney damage, blood clots and cancerous tumour growth.^{1,2,3,4} Although there are currently no identified reliable population-based incidence rates to describe the magnitude of impact for adverse outcomes associated with injectable unauthorized peptide drugs in Canada, there is also a lack of rigorous clinical research regarding the safety and efficacy of these products in humans.

Unauthorized injectable drugs may contain toxic ingredients, including high-risk additives and contaminants such as solvents, heavy metals, glass, plastic, bacteria and endotoxins.¹ In June 2026, the Chief Health Officer of the Victoria State Department of Health in Australia issued a health alert that reported six cases of acute liver toxicity associated with unapproved peptide products labelled “Retatrutide”. The alert also noted that the clinical presentation of the cases suggested contaminants in the products may have contributed to the observed liver toxicity.¹⁰

Additional concerns Health Canada has outlined include interactions with other medications a patient may be taking, incorrect labelling, and improper manufacturing and storage of unauthorized injectable peptide drugs.¹

Health Canada has also stated in their Recalls and Safety Alerts that certain peptide powders (GHK-Cu & BPC-157) are unauthorized active pharmaceutical ingredients.¹¹

The use of unauthorized peptides

It may be possible for Canadians to obtain unauthorized peptide drugs, either online or through other users, that are labelled “for research use only” or “not for human consumption” and inject them for personal use. Also worryingly, media investigations have reported instances of physicians and pharmacists exploiting a regulatory gap by prescribing Body Protection Compound-157 (BPC-157) as a compounded natural health product and selling it to patients in pill form.¹²

Physicians should screen patients to understand if they are using unauthorized products and, when appropriate, provide counselling [*see box inset: Unauthorized peptide drugs: guidance for physicians*]. Personal use of unauthorized peptides has become a significant issue and will likely continue to grow as new peptides are created, online access increases and the popularity of personalized health grows. Prescribers should stay informed of emerging legislative, regulatory, and efficacy issues regarding unauthorized peptides, as these products may significantly impact patient wellness and public health.

Unauthorized peptide drugs: guidance for physicians

Patients may have questions about the efficacy and safety of unauthorized peptides, and/or they may already be taking one or more of them.

As outlined in our 2026 article, “[Unauthorized injectable peptides and their potential serious health risks](#)”, CPSA offers the following guidance to physicians:

- “Ask patients about the use of non-prescribed injectable products, particularly those purchased online.
- Be alert to potential complications associated with unregulated peptide use.
- Verify whether an injectable peptide product has been authorized for human use by searching [Health Canada’s Drug Product Database](#) or [Licensed Natural Health Product Database](#).
- Counsel patients about the risks of purchasing prescription medications from unlicensed sources and advise them not to buy or use unauthorized products.
- Educate patients that, in Canada, prescription medications can only be legally sold by licensed pharmacies, and that authorized products will display one of the following on the label:
 - An eight-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN)
 - A Natural Product Number (NPN)
 - A Homeopathic Drug Number (DIN-HM)
- Inform patients that unused products should be returned to a local pharmacy for safe disposal.
- Report adverse events related to health products to Health Canada.”¹³

PART II – Authorized peptides

Health Canada has authorized several peptide drugs for human use. These medications can be categorized by mechanism of action, biological function, molecular structure and clinical indication. Examples include insulin, oxytocin, calcitonin, desmopressin, glucagon, octreotide, semaglutide and tirzepatide.

Of note are glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonist and dual gastric inhibitory peptide (GIP)/GLP-1 receptor agonist classes of peptides. Use of these medications has expanded beyond treating Type 2 diabetes mellitus and supporting weight management to include treatment of broader chronic disease indications, particularly cardio-metabolic diseases. In 2026, Health Canada approved a new indication for Ozempic® (semaglutide): to reduce major adverse cardiovascular events (MACE) in adults with type 2 diabetes and established cardiovascular disease and/or chronic kidney disease.^{14,15} Health Canada also approved Zepbound® (tirzepatide) for the treatment of moderate-to-severe obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) in adults with obesity (BMI ≥ 30 kg/m²).^{16,17} Additional authorized uses for these peptide classes have emerged, and further indications are likely as clinical evidence and uptake continue to grow.

Authorized generic semaglutides

Health Canada has authorized several generic semaglutide products since April 2026, including generic versions of Ozempic® (for once-weekly treatment of adult patients with type 2 diabetes to manage blood sugar levels) and a generic version of Wegovy® (first generic semaglutide injection for weight loss indication).^{6,18,19,20,21,22,23,24} As many generic medications are 45 to 90% cheaper than the brand-name versions, having generic semaglutides available may magnify the increasing use of this class of medication.^{6,18,19}

Off-label prescribing

Certain peptide medications have emerging off-label uses. For example, glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists are being studied or used off-label for conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, polycystic ovarian syndrome and others.²⁵ As these peptides become more widely available and their clinical use expands, physicians should consider the implications of off-label prescribing [see box inset: *What is off-label use?*].

Off-label use of authorized medications may be appropriate when clinical and scientific evidence demonstrates that the beneficial effects outweigh the health risks to the patient. In some cases, strong emerging research evidence or widely accepted clinical guidance from medical specialty experts may support off-label use.

Regulatory bodies may find it difficult to monitor off-label uses due to a number of factors, including the lack of accurate record-keeping, newly developed medications not being in the monitoring system, limited access to clinical indication data, and complex patient medical profiles where the medication is prescribed for approved and off-label uses for the same patient. Guidance for *patients* regarding off-label use is available from the Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada (ISMP Canada).²⁸

What is off-label use?

In Canada, the term “off-label use” refers to the prescribing of licensed medications for uses and clinical indications that are not within the marketing authorization by Health Canada. “Off-label use” also includes prescribing dosages, frequencies, durations and routes of administration that are outside the Canadian Product Monograph. Off-label prescribing may be more common for certain populations, such as pediatric and senior groups, as drug authorizations by Health Canada are frequently based on clinical trials with non-geriatric adults.

Physicians who prescribe off-label must be aware of the inherent liability risks involved. In [this article](#), published by the Canadian Medical Protective Association (CMPA) in March 2026, CMPA offers guidance to help physicians mitigate the medico-legal risks when prescribing off-label.²⁶

Patients must be informed when a treatment is considered off-label and physicians should obtain informed consent before prescribing a medication for off-label use. An additional consideration is whether the medication will be covered by the patient’s health insurance plan if it is used off-label.

Note: The marketing or promotion of prescription medications, non-prescription medications and natural health products is only allowed if the products are authorized for sale by Health Canada.²⁷ Authorized medications and products may not be advertised for uses beyond the authorized indications and recommended uses set by Health Canada. Information about illegal marketing practices in Canada may be found in [this resource](#).²⁷

Prescribing *Standards of Practice* and off-label prescribing

Reminder: Regulated members must comply with CPSA *Standards of Practice* when prescribing for off-label or authorized indications.

From the regulatory perspective, physicians are expected to:

1. Prescribe based on the current best available scientific evidence and widely accepted clinical practice guidelines, where available
2. Ensure appropriate justification for clinical decision-making involving prescribing
3. Discuss medication risks, benefits and any alternative treatments with the patient in a transparent and thorough manner
4. Monitor effectiveness and adverse events
5. Review the patient’s Pharmaceutical Information Network (PIN) data in Alberta Netcare before prescribing
6. Document patient discussions and the rationale for prescribing decisions
7. Comply with federal and provincial legislation regarding prescribing

A list of relevant CPSA *Standards of Practice* is provided below. Physicians should familiarize themselves with these standards and their accompanying Advice to the Profession documents.

Relevant *Standards of Practice*

- [Prescribing: Administration](#)
- [Prescribing: Drugs Associated With Substance Use Disorders Or Substance-Related Harm](#)
- [Practising Outside of Established Conventional Medicine](#)
- [Informed Consent](#)
- [Advertising](#)
- [Code of Ethics & Professionalism](#)

Conclusion

The topics discussed above are constantly evolving from regulatory, legislative and clinical perspectives. Physicians should stay informed about the relevant developing issues related to these substances, as their use is expected to grow in popularity. Compliance with CPSA *Standards of Practice* remains essential, especially when prescribing for off-label indications.

It is important that physicians always provide ethical and professional care in patients' best interests, including when prescribing peptide medications.

Further details about the subjects discussed in this Prescribing Companion may be found in the *Standards of Practice* documents listed above, and in the *References cited* section.

Questions? For inquiries or feedback, please contact us at AIR.Inquiries@cpsa.ab.ca.

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