

National Pharmacare Program

Canada is the only industrialized country of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with a universal health care system that does not provide pharmaceutical coverage for its citizens.

1. Bill Casey's Parliamentary Committee on Health wrote a report entitled "Pharmacare Now: Prescription Medicine Coverage for All Canadians".
 - The 120 page report had 17 recommendations and the first recommendation was to implement a National Pharmacare Program
 - In the report the Parliamentary Budget Officer projected a \$4-11 billion savings
 - This saving would pay for the high dose flu vaccine and shingles vaccine for seniors over age 65

2. Dr. Eric Hoskins Advisory Committee wrote a report on the "Implementation of a National Pharmacare Program"
 - In the March 19, 2019 Federal Budget the following recommendations were included:
 - Canada Drug Agency with \$35 million over next 4 years to act as a clearing house to assess the effectiveness of new drugs, negotiate prices on behalf of Canada's drug plans and recommend best value
 - Catastrophic drug coverage to treat rare diseases of \$500 million in 2022 and \$500 million in 2023
 - National formulary of a list of drugs that have been evaluated for both efficiency and cost effectiveness
 - List of common and essential drugs by January 1, 2022 at a cost of \$3.5 billion
 - Comprehensive list of drugs by January 1, 2027 at a cost of \$15.3 billion per year

Question:

Does your party support a National Drug Program and if so how will you work collaboratively with the other Ministers of Health and Seniors to overcome jurisdictional issues and implement universal public pharmacare with a national formulary?

jurisdictional

WRITTEN BY DONYA ZIAEE

THEIR PHARMACARE PLAN AND OURS

Back in March, news of a pharmacare deal between the Liberals and the NDP was announced with much fanfare from both parties, despite the agreement's lack of both detail and ambition.

Months later, the specifics of the agreement remain fuzzy. Although the government has committed to a Canada Pharmacare Act by the end of 2023, it has offered few details on what the law will actually look like. The agreement is, importantly, not a promise to implement pharmacare. Rather, it's a promise to "continue progress" towards a universal national pharmacare program.

With so little detail, and no actual blueprint for how progress will be made, there is only one true measure of the strength of this pharmacare pledge: the reaction from Canada's Big Pharma lobby.

A day after the new deal was signed, Innovative Medicines Canada—the country's most powerful pharmaceutical lobby, whose primary objective has been to delay, deter, and obstruct universal public pharmacare—released a statement applauding the plan.

Why isn't Big Pharma screaming bloody murder? Because the deal is so vague that it almost resembles a blank canvas—a canvas onto which pharmaceutical companies are undoubtedly keen to paint their own version of pharmacare.

For the pharma lobby, that means pulling out all the stops to prevent a public pharmacare plan from ever being realized.

"A national pharmacare program must build on the strengths of our current dual-market system and focus on improving access for the Canadians who need it most: the uninsured and underinsured," Pamela Fralick, the president of IMC, said in the statement.

In non-lobby speak, that means: keep our current patchwork system while throwing a few bones to people who've fallen through the cracks, but don't touch drug prices (or Big Pharma profits).

Critically, the Liberal-NDP agreement is mum on whether the pharmacare program in the works will be a public one.

Currently, rather than universal, single-payer prescription drug coverage, Canadians have access to either public plans with province-specific eligibility criteria, private insurance plans that vary by employer, age, and other factors, or nothing at all.

This patchwork system has unsurprisingly had its biggest defenders in the pharmaceutical and insurance industries. For years, they've funneled billions of dollars into lobbying campaigns in support of a "fill in the gaps" approach that combines both public and private insurance—keenly aware that a single-payer public pharmacare program would endanger their profits by driving down drug prices.

That the government's announcements make no explicit promise to implement a public pharmacare program should be of grave concern.

For too long, our elected representatives have been playing political football with pharmacare—scoring points by appearing to move the needle on its implementation. It's no surprise why. The idea of pharmacare is overwhelmingly popular in Canada. Poll after poll suggest super-majority support.

But despite this public support, we've seen mostly empty gestures by the ruling federal Liberals, whose support for the program ebbs and flows with little in the way of real progress. The party included pharmacare as a key campaign plank in the 2019 federal election. In his 2020 Throne Speech, the Prime Minister promised to "accelerate" progress on pharmacare but then committed no new spending in the fall economic plan that followed. In 2021, the Liberals dropped pharmacare from their election campaign altogether.

The new deal with the NDP continues that tradition, including only a "pharmacare pantomime," as Dr. Nav Persaud, family physician and Canada Research Chair in health justice, so poignantly described it. The real barometer of success, then, is not the March announcement, but whether or not the Liberals can turn this political dance into an actual race to the finish line: a universal, single-payer, public, national pharmacare program.

Turning pharmacare from political gimmick to reality will depend, ultimately, on our elected leaders' willingness to stop kowtowing to powerful corporate lobbyists—and for this to happen, we must be relentless in pressuring them to deliver for us instead. **CP**

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National Pharmacare Plan

Key Message: Canada Needs a National Pharmacare Plan

Canada is the only country in the world with universal health care that does not provide universal coverage for prescription drugs or Health Canada recommended vaccines for seniors. Approximately 20 per cent of Canadians have inadequate drug coverage or no coverage at all and must pay out of pocket. For over 20 years, numerous government and private studies have shown an overwhelming need for a universal pharmacare program.

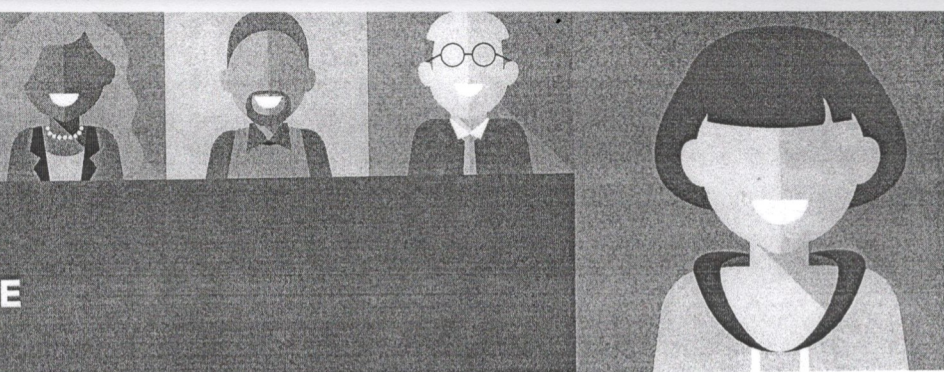
When it comes to saving lives, vaccines come second in global importance, second only to clean drinking water. The patchwork of funded and unfunded vaccines, non-standardized information and the lack of a universal tracking system have diminished Canada's ability to develop a strong public health policy based on data.

Aspects to Consider:

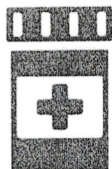
- Dr. Eric Hoskins, Ontario's former Minister of Health & Long-Term Care, reported that 1 in 5 households reported a family member who had not taken prescribed medicine due to cost, and that almost one million Canadians cut back on food or home heating in order to pay for their medication.
- A universal, public Pharmacare Plan would allow for better monitoring of medications. One in six hospitalizations could be avoided if prescription drugs were used appropriately.
- Canadians pay the third-highest prescription costs of all countries in the world. As a country, we would save between \$4 and \$11 billion with a national drug plan that had interprovincial cooperation in buying.
- As individuals age, their immune systems weaken. Many vaccines have been developed specifically to provide better protection for seniors as they age. This supports their desire to live healthy, active and productive lives and reduces morbidity, mortality and overall health-care costs.

Questions for our politicians:

1. Does your party support a national pharmacare initiative?
2. What will your party do to reduce medication costs?
3. Will your party support and fund a national vaccination plan for seniors?
4. What will your party do to work collaboratively with other levels of government to overcome jurisdictional issues and implement a national pharmacare plan?



PRIORITIZE PHARMACARE



KEY MESSAGE

All Canadians should have access to the medications they need. A universal, public, comprehensive, accessible and portable national pharmacare program would cut costs and lead to a healthier population. It would also allow for better monitoring of medications and reduce the burden on other parts of the health care system.

THE ISSUE

Canada is the only country in the world with universal health care that does not also provide universal drug coverage. Canadians consistently pay among the highest prices for prescription drugs. Ten per cent of Canadians do not have adequate coverage to meet their needs. One in four households in Canada can't afford to fill their prescriptions.

A universal, public pharmacare program would help Canadians better manage their health, lead to reduced medication costs and allow for better monitoring of the effectiveness and safety of medications. It would also reduce the burden on other parts of the health care system.

THE CHALLENGES

Access

- Drug coverage should not depend on where you work or live.

Costs, But With Advantages

- Studies estimate that a coordinated, national drug plan would save between \$4 and \$11-billion annually.

Quality and Safety

- A universal, public plan could improve methods to monitor and evaluate drugs, and could support quality, evidence-based drug coverage. One in six hospitalizations could be avoided if prescription drugs were used more appropriately.

Coverage

- A national formulary should be based on scientific evidence and best value for money, and must help Canadians uphold their health and wellbeing.

THE QUESTIONS

- 1 How will your party implement a universal, public, comprehensive, accessible and portable pharmacare program? ✓
- 2 What timeline does your party propose for the implementation of a universal, public pharmacare program?
- 3 How will your party ensure that federal and provincial governments work together effectively to implement universal, public pharmacare?
- 4 How will your party ensure a comprehensive, quality, evidence-based formulary, so that Canadian's can access the medications they need to maintain and improve their health? ✓

MORE INFORMATION

Canadian Health Coalition

<http://healthcoalition.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Policy-Brief-NPDP.pdf>

Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare

www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/corporate/about-health-canada/public-engagement/external-advisory-bodies/implementation-national-pharmacare.html

VIBRANT VOICES 



National Pharmacare

Key message

All Canadians should have access to the medications they need. A universal, public, comprehensive, accessible and portable national Pharmacare program would cut costs and lead to a healthier population

What is the issue?

Canada is the only country in the world with universal health care that does not also provide universal drug coverage and we consistently pay among the highest prices for prescription drugs. Twenty per cent of Canadians have inadequate coverage to meet their needs. One in four households in Canada can't afford to fill their prescriptions.

A universal, public Pharmacare program would help Canadians better manage their health, lead to reduced medication costs and allow for better monitoring of the effectiveness and safety of medications. It would also reduce the burden on other parts of the health care system.

Advantages for Canadians

Canadians would save between \$4 and \$11-billion with a national drug plan that had interprovincial cooperation in buying. With no plan, Canadians drug costs as a share of GDP have more than tripled since 1985.

The disparity in drug costs, insurance coverage and drug availability would be eliminated. Today, prescription drug coverage is provided through a patchwork of 100 public and 100,000 private insurance plans. Many Canadians can't afford insurance or prescription drugs and do without, suffering poor health and requiring more expensive, taxpayer-funded medical services as a result.

One in six hospitalizations could be avoided if prescription drugs were used appropriately.

A universal, public Pharmacare Plan would allow for better monitoring of medications, support, evidence-based drug coverage, and reduce the burden on other parts of the health care system.

Questions

- Will your party implement a universal, public, comprehensive, accessible and portable Pharmacare program?
- Will your party ensure that federal and provincial governments work together effectively to implement universal, public Pharmacare?
- Will your party ensure a comprehensive, evidence-based formulary, so that Canadian's can access the medications they need to maintain and improve their health?

More information

- Canadian Health Coalition:
<http://bit.ly/2Wqae4>
- Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare:
<http://bit.ly/2PJxa8>

NATIONAL PHARMACARE PROGRAMME

ISSUE

2015 Election

Pharmaceuticals are the largest cause of health costs in the country. Canada is the only industrialized country in the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) with a Universal Health Care System that does not provide public pharmaceutical coverage for its citizens. Legislation is needed that would guarantee that pharmacare services are available to all Canadians regardless of where they live in Canada.

FACTS

We pay 15% to 20% more than the International Average price for new drugs.

1. 10% of Canadians DO NOT FILL their prescriptions because of costs.
2. Brand name drugs are expensive.
e.g. Tylenol Extra Strength \$16.99
Generic Extra Strength \$5.99

3. Canada needs a national strategy to bid for contracts with the drug companies to negotiate better prices.
4. Canada needs to purchase drugs in bulk thus reducing the costs.
5. \$7.3 - \$11.4 billion would be saved with a National Pharmacare Programme. All Canadians would benefit.

QUESTIONS FOR THE MP CANDIDATE:

1. If elected, will you and your party support the creation of a National Pharmacare Programme?
2. If elected, will you and your party establish a bidding procedure for the purchase of drugs?
3. If elected, will you and your party support purchasing drugs in bulk?

REFERENCES

Time for a New Prescription: Universal Public Pharmacare is Safe and Affordable. Julie White November 2014, Congress of Union Retirees of Canada

Estimated cost of universal public coverage of prescription drugs in Canada Steven Morgan, Michael Law, Jamie R. Daw, Liza Abramham, Danielle Martin

NOTE: The federal government is presently negotiating the Canada European Trade Agreement. There are discussions regarding pharmaceuticals including market exclusivity, which has a "no filing" period in which no application of generic drugs can be given regulatory consideration and a two-year period during which generic drugs can progress toward market readiness but not be sold.