

National Pharmacare

Neighbourhood Pharmacies' Position:

- Our top priority has, and always will be, improving access to prescription medications for all Canadians. We want to be a part of the solution that ensures no Canadian will go without the prescription medication they need.
- Canada's priority should be on helping those who don't have coverage and those with insufficient coverage, without disrupting the majority of Canadians who have drug coverage, especially during a global pandemic.
- To best support Canadians and to ensure access to the medications they need, we need to maintain and build on the current drug coverage millions of Canadians currently receive through public and private drug plans.
- To ensure an equitable approach, the federal government should establish guiding principles of pharmacare with the provinces and territories to ensure basic coverage for all Canadians while maintaining the integrity of existing provincial and private plans.



National Pharmacare

Canada's pharmacies serve millions of patients from across the country every year, and we have a deep understanding of the gaps that currently exist in Canada's pharmacare policies. We continue to urge the federal government to continue working with provincial governments across the country, to identify ways to provide drug coverage to Canadians who need it most, while ensuring continuity of coverage for those who have it.

Pharmacists are the most frequent touchpoint most Canadians have with the health system and are a key community health resource. Pharmacists regularly provide their patients with trusted healthcare services, ensure a safe and secure supply of medications to keep Canadians healthy and help reduce healthcare costs in other, more expensive parts of the system, by managing chronic diseases and therapies, and keeping people out of hospital.

We believe that any new national pharmacare plan must prioritize caring for the uninsured and underinsured and providing coverage to those who need it most particularly those living with and needing medications to treat rare diseases.

There is a unique opportunity in Canada for the federal government to work with the provincial and territorial governments to ensure that every Canadian has access to the medication they need.

This can be achieved by:

1. Establishing guiding principles of Pharmacare with the provinces and territories to ensure that every Canadian has access to the medication they need, regardless of where they live, if they are employed or how much money they make. These principles should state that:
 - Every Canadian should have access to a prescription drug program, whether private or public.
 - Every Canadian should have a choice in maintaining their existing drug coverage or opting into a provincial or territorial drug program.
 - Every drug program (whether public or private) should include coverage for all drugs listed on a comprehensive Minimum National Formulary created by the Canadian Drug Agency (however drug plans can elect to cover more than the Minimum National Formulary).



National Pharmacare

- Every drug program should include coverage for catastrophic care that ensures the coverage of drug expenses that exceed a threshold compared to household income (for example, 3 per cent of household income).
 - Every drug program should include special coverage for rare diseases to be developed in alignment with the Federal Government's Rare Disease Strategy.
2. Providing federal sustainable funding to the provinces and territories to help bring all residents under a drug plan or to assist in updating and improving coverage where required including by increasing the Canada Health Transfer.

Drug coverage in Canada is a complex landscape that varies province to province. The number of Canadians enrolled in public or private plans varies greatly by province and while some provinces have mostly closed coverage gaps other provinces have remaining gaps to fill.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown Canadians that some of the social safety nets that we value are far from perfect. In fact, the pandemic exposed gaps in many services, from mental healthcare to access to Employment Insurance. Since March, the government has had to rapidly strengthen many programs to meet the basic needs of many Canadians.

While the strains on our healthcare system have been unparalleled in our lifetime, Canadian's access to prescription drugs has remained almost untouched. Based on industry data, 98.5 per cent of Canadians have maintained their drug coverage during the pandemic, and access to drugs across the country have remained stable.

According to our recent survey from November 2020 and industry data, some 32.5-35 million Canadians already have prescription drug coverage, either through public or private plans or a combination of both.

It is this uninsured segment of the population that a National Pharmacare program must address.



National Pharmacare

In order to best inform our positioning, we commissioned a pan-Canadian survey that provided us key insights into drug coverage and prescription drug use across Canada. Some of the key findings from our survey are;

- Canadians are overwhelmingly concerned with the COVID-19 pandemic. Our survey shows that only 3 per cent of Canadians feel that pharmacare should be a main government priority.
- Canadians feel that healthcare issues such as senior care, long-term care, reducing weight times and mental health are more deserving of immediate government action.
- While Canadians are generally supportive of the concept of national pharmacare (82 per cent supportive), just 25 per cent support a fully funded government program that replaces all existing private and public plans.
- An overwhelming majority of Canadians (72 per cent) are concerned with the potential impact of a national pharmacare program on their existing drug coverage.
- Compared to our study in 2018, accounting for the affects of COVID-19, we have found that there has only been an increase in the uninsured population by 2 per cent.



To learn more, visit www.completetheplan.ca.



National Pharmacare

References:

[1] Canadian Pharmacists Association – Pharmacare Advocacy Canadian

<https://www.pharmacists.ca/advocacy/pharmacare-20/>

[2] Pharmacists Association – Closing the Coverage Gap

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[3] The Conference Board of Canada – Understanding the Gap

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[4] Parliamentary Budget Officer – Federal Cost of a National Pharmacare Program

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