



COMPLETE THE PLAN: A NATIONAL MODEL FOR PHARMACARE

ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

This guide provides background and key messages for engaging with media and local, provincial, and federal decision-makers on the topic of national pharmacare and our [Complete the Plan](#) approach.

1) BACKGROUND

The top priority for pharmacy teams will always be improving access to prescription medications for all Canadians. We want to be a part of the solution ensuring no Canadian goes without the prescription medication they need.

Pharmacy teams know the importance of ensuring patients can access the medication needed without financial barriers. No Canadian should have to decide between paying for required prescription medications or putting food on the table. Whether through public or private drug plans, all Canadians should have access to drug coverage. All providers – government, pharmacy, insurers, and employers – have a role to play in ensuring medication access for everyone.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown Canadians the many gaps in our public healthcare system. Governments across Canada worked rapidly to close gaps and implement solutions.

While the strains on our healthcare system caused by the pandemic are unparalleled in our lifetime, Canadians' access to prescription drugs has remained almost untouched.

Based on industry data, 98.5 percent of Canadians maintained their drug coverage during the pandemic, and access to drugs across the country has remained stable. According to a survey from November 2020, between 32.5 and 35 million Canadians already have prescription drug coverage, either through public or private plans, or a combination of both. It is the *uninsured* segment of the population that a national pharmacare program must address. Pharmacy teams know the gaps that exist. They see firsthand the hardship faced by Canadians unable to cover their medication costs.

Universal access to prescription drug coverage can be achieved while respecting provincial and territorial jurisdiction for healthcare delivery. Ensuring every Canadian has access to the medicines they need is essential.

We believe any national pharmacare program must satisfy 5 patient-centred principles:

- 1. Equity:** Every Canadian should have equitable, consistent access to prescription medications.
- 2. Timeliness of Access:** All Canadians should be able to access the medicines they need in a timely manner.
- 3. Appropriateness of Therapy:** All Canadians should have access to high-quality, effective medications appropriate to their individual needs.
- 4. Affordability:** All Canadians should be able to afford their medications at the point of care, and no Canadian should face cost barriers to prescription access.
- 5. Sustainability:** All Canadians should benefit from a pharmacare program that ensures ongoing health system sustainability.

2) POLITICAL ANALYSIS: WHERE FEDERAL PARTIES STAND

NDP: Have an ideological approach to national pharmacare. The only acceptable policy outcome would be to replace existing drug plans with a universal, public-payor program. With the confidence and supply agreement, they have bought themselves some additional influence on the government's policy direction. While the parties have agreed to work together to introduce a Canada Pharmacare Act by the end of 2023, details on the path forward are light. The NDP will continue to advocate for their preferred approach on Pharmacare, but the lack of details in the agreement is a testament to the differing policy views between them and the government. As the pharmacare conversation continues, the NDP will need to make a strategic decision on whether to hold government to the fire in an effort to see a universal single-payor model be introduced, or whether they will allow the Liberals to introduce a fill-the-gaps model in an opportunity to use a non-universal model as a wedge issue in the next election.

Green Party: Want to replace existing drug plans with a universal, single-payer public option. They have criticized the long timeline on the Hoskins Report and called for a faster implementation but don't specify a timeline.

Bloc Québécois: In Quebec, drug coverage is mandatory for everyone, either through an employer plan or a public plan in which people must enrol if not otherwise covered. There is precedent for Quebec opting out of national social programs: e.g., Quebecers aren't members of the Canada Pension Plan and instead belong to the Quebec Pension Plan. The Bloc will continue to hold the line that they will not vote in-favour of any national pharmacare program unless equivalent compensation upon opting out is guaranteed to Quebec.

Liberal: During the pandemic, work on national pharmacare was largely shelved to address the COVID-19 pandemic and to move forward alternative policy priorities that were deemed to be a larger need, such as \$10 a day childcare. Throughout the governments mandate they have remained open to a universal option and balanced approach. As the government looks to move forward on a national pharmacare program, the government will be evaluating their policy options on Dental Care to see if there is alignment. Two significant challenges for the government will be navigating the relationship with the NDP as it pertains to their ideological approach to this file, but also in navigating the provincial government's desire to see a substantial increase to the Canada Health Transfer.

Conservative: Currently not supportive of a universal, public option, or necessarily supportive of a "fill-the-gaps" plan. They support improving access to medications but are vague about policy details. In addition to their prior vague stance on pharmacare, the ongoing Conservative Party leadership muddies the water even further. While it is certain they would not support a universal single-payor model, the Conservative position will remain uncertain until a new leader is chosen.

3) OUR TWO CORE RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION #1

Establish guiding principles of pharmacare with the provinces and territories to ensure every Canadian can access the medication they need.

Guiding Principles

- Every Canadian should have access to a prescription drug program, whether private or public.
- Every Canadian should have the choice to maintain their existing drug coverage or opt into a provincial/territorial drug program.
- Every drug program (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).
- Every drug program should include coverage for catastrophic care that ensures the coverage of drug expenses that exceed a threshold compared to household income (e.g., 3% 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*.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Provide sustainable federal funding to provinces/territories, bringing all residents under a drug plan that updates and improves coverage, and increases the Canada Health Transfer.

4) OUR PHARMACARE MODEL: WHAT THE PROGRAM SHOULD LOOK LIKE

Mixed Payer

Pharmacare should be a mixed-payer model to ensure all Canadians have coverage and maintain existing care levels. The model relies on private insurance providers *and* public drug plans for prescription medication coverage. Leveraging the benefits of existing public and private programs offers a broad range of prescription medications and access to timely, accessible care.

Minimum National Formulary

To ensure an equitable approach, the federal government should identify a common baseline of coverage for all Canadians while maintaining the integrity of existing provincial and private plans. This formulary should aspire to reach the highest denominator – the Quebec formulary – the most comprehensive in Canada.

5) OUR POSITION STATEMENT & KEY MESSAGES:

Position Statement: All Canadians deserve access to the medications they need.

We have a model for national pharmacare that helps those who need it most, keeps costs down and doesn't disrupt existing plans ([completetheplan.ca](https://www.completetheplan.ca)).

Key Messages:

- Many Canadians, unfortunately, do not have any drug coverage or are underinsured, which is why we believe changes that improve access to prescription medications are essential.
- Our *Complete the Plan* model is a sustainable approach that allows governments to direct funds to other healthcare priorities, including mental health, seniors care, long-term care, First Nations health, reduced surgical and diagnostic wait times and home care.
- Cost should never be a barrier to accessing prescription medications in Canada. We need to ensure safeguards are in place to protect Canada's most vulnerable from being priced out of their medications, especially people who rely on expensive drugs to treat rare diseases.
- We need to take the best features from existing public and private drug programs and build on them to make them better. We need to intervene now to catch those who are most vulnerable and currently going without the medications they need.
- All Canadians deserve access to the medications they need to live a healthy life. No Canadian should have to decide between paying for required prescription medications or putting food on the table.
- Recent surveys show Canadians support a pharmacare program but don't want a negative impact on their current level of care. Canadians tell us they want a national pharmacare program that ensures everyone can access prescription drugs. **Many have also told us they don't want to disrupt their current drug plans or coverage.** 75% of Canadians would prefer a program that leaves existing coverage intact.

- Ensuring universal access by building on, rather than replacing, the coverage enjoyed by those with private plans will minimize disruption.
- By building on the existing mix of private and public drug coverage, the federal government can achieve a pharmacare plan that sets a higher bar for drug coverage in Canada – and maintains the medications available through the public and private plans that already support millions of Canadians.

6) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

Q1: Who is part of the Complete the Plan initiative?

The Complete the Plan initiative is a partnership between Canadian pharmacists and pharmacies.

Q2: What is the estimated cost of the Complete the Plan model of national pharmacare?

Placing Canadians on equitable footing is a goal worth paying for. *Complete the Plan* estimates the net new cost for public coverage of those who are uninsured/underinsured is far less than the \$19 billion net new cost to create a single-payer model outlined in the Parliamentary Budget Officer report.

Estimated costs to *Complete the Plan*:

- **\$2.9 billion** could provide drug coverage to every *uninsured* Canadian.
- **\$2.2 billion** could support those with *insufficient* coverage who experience barriers to access due to financial costs.
- **\$5.1 billion** could ensure no Canadian goes without access to prescription medications by ensuring coverage to those who are *uninsured and underinsured*.

Our Complete the Plan approach provides prescription drug access to every Canadian and peace of mind to nearly 5.2 million Canadians without coverage for their prescription medications.

Q3: Aren't pharmacies just advocating for what's in their financial interest?

- No. Pharmacies' interests are first and foremost with their patients and advocating for better access to medications across the country.
- With even one Canadian falling through the cracks, the status quo is unacceptable to us.
- Through Complete the Plan, we have an opportunity to find solutions that will improve the patient experience and outcomes, improve access and be sustainable well into the future.
- We advocate for a revitalized pharmacare program ensuring prescription drug access for all Canadians. And we want to work in partnership with the government to get there.

Q4: What financial impact will pharmacare have on pharmacies?

- Changes to pharmaceutical policies directly impact pharmacies.
- While there will be a direct impact on pharmacies depending on the model put forward, our priority is and continues to be serving our patients' best interests.
- We believe there is a path forward that will improve access for Canadians who need it most while upholding the strengths and benefits of the current system.

7) DRAFT OP-ED ON NATIONAL PHARMACARE

This op-ed can be submitted to media by pharmacy team members. Please advise Neighbourhood Pharmacies when submitting.

Healthcare has emerged among the top priorities for Canadians throughout this pandemic. As a medical expert and pharmacist working in city/town, I understand both the science behind medications and the needs of patients in our community. It is unacceptable that some Canadians still lack prescription drug coverage in our universal healthcare system.

With a commitment from the federal government to improve access to prescription medications for Canadians, and a pre-existing commitment to develop and fund a rare disease strategy, a unique opportunity exists to make a real difference in the lives of Canadians.

We need to take the best pieces from existing public and private drug programs and build on them to make them better. We need to intervene now to catch those who are most vulnerable and currently going without the medication they need. We can do this.

By setting guiding principles for pharmacare and working with the provinces and territories to implement pharmacare programs within their own jurisdictions, we can limit disruption to patients with existing medication coverage and allow for a new national pharmacare plan to be implemented now.

We can also minimize costs and reserve critical healthcare funding for other essential programs like seniors' care, long-term care, and mental health.

Using this model, within a year, the federal government could provide a "pharmacare transfer" to the provinces and territories to support a pan-Canadian approach to national pharmacare that enables federal support and respects provincial jurisdiction.

The federal government can set principles for this program and work with provinces and territories to ensure every Canadian is guaranteed equitable prescription medication coverage, while allowing flexibility for provinces and private drug plans.

This system would result in universal coverage for all Canadians without overhauling every drug program in the country. It would reduce government costs to replace coverage that already exists through private and public plans and allow government funds to be invested in other priority areas.

By focusing to *Complete the Plan*, the government can ensure patients have the choice to keep their current drug plans and focus on providing coverage to those who need it the most.

When it comes to improving access to medications for all Canadians, this is a plan we can all support.

8) REQUEST TO MEET WITH DECISION-MAKER

The meeting request below can be emailed to your local decision-maker, asking for an opportunity to have a meeting/discussion on national pharmacare.

Day, Month, Year

Dear Name,

I am a pharmacist/pharmacy team member in your riding/ward/electoral district/constituency and work at name of pharmacy.

I know how important it is for people in our community to have access to healthcare. I also know how much Canadians value the trusted support and advice they receive from their local pharmacy teams.

Pharmacy teams in Canada do a lot. We are the most accessible members of the healthcare system and are an essential public health and primary care provider in urban, rural, and remote communities. In fact, 95% of Canadians live within 5 kilometres of a community pharmacy.

Pharmacies are community health hubs and integral points of patient care. We provide patients with trusted advice, ensure a safe and secure supply of medications to keep Canadians healthy and help reduce costs in more expensive parts of the system by preventing illness and keeping people out of hospitals – especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A big part of keeping Canadians healthy is ensuring they have access to the medications they need to live a healthy life. No Canadian should decide between paying for medicine or putting food on the table.

As my representative, I am asking you to help me ensure all Canadians can access the prescription medications they need.

Based on my experience with patients in my community, Canada's priority should be helping those who don't have drug coverage and those with insufficient coverage - without disrupting the majority of Canadians who already have it.

I'm requesting an opportunity to meet with you and discuss this issue further.

I am confident that through a collaborative approach, we will be able to work together to ensure all Canadians have coverage when it comes to access to prescription medication.

Please contact me at [insert email address](#) and we can organize a meeting at your earliest convenience to discuss national pharmacare.

Regards,

[name](#)

[name of pharmacy, if applicable](#)