

It's time for universal **pharmacare**



ACT NOW!



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Letter from Unifor's National President

On behalf of 315,000 workers and voters working and living in municipalities across Canada, Unifor is speaking up to exercise our political voice and make a difference in the lives of all Canadians. This is the time to send a united message to tell decision-makers and employers to act for universal national pharmacare - the unfinished business of our national health care system.

Canada is at a unique juncture in history. The time to create transformative change necessary to address the critical issues of an aging population, along with access, value, safety and public ownership of health services is now. The majority of these evolving issues can be addressed through a universal national pharmacare plan.

Compared to the 10 countries with universal coverage of outpatient prescription drugs, Canada recorded list prices at about 61 per cent higher despite having a comparable volume. The prices represent a shocking estimated \$2.3 billion 'overspend' relative to average costs in these other ten countries. In addition to this, Canada's spotty prescription coverage system is inefficient and expensive, with Canadians paying wildly different rates and receiving grossly inconsistent coverage.

What's worse is that the more precariously employed you are, the less likely you are to have drug coverage. This means that some of the most marginalized contract and part-time workers are gravely impacted.

Unifor's call for a national pharmacare program in Canada is not only rooted in the well-established economic benefits of implementing such a program, but it is primarily based on the principle that all Canadians should have equitable access to public health care and all medically necessary prescription drugs without financial or other barriers.

As our union works to synchronize our efforts with the labour movement and community partners, we are urging public officials and employers to speak out publicly in support of a national pharmacare program. To ensure that the voices of the most disadvantaged by the lack of national drug coverage are at the forefront of this struggle, we need your help. Speak out and speak up for national pharmacare.

In this booklet, you will find resources to aid you in your own support to advocate for universal pharmacare, including a motion that can be presented to your municipal council and a letter for employers to sign to show support.

Together, we can win a national, universal pharmacare program so that no Canadian has to choose between paying the rent and getting a prescription filled.

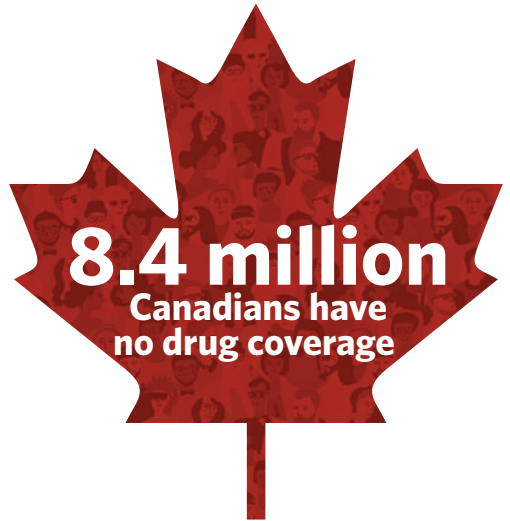
In solidarity,

*Jerry Dias
National President*

Why Pharmacare?

Unifor is advocating for the creation of a public, national universal pharmacare program because it will benefit everyone. Research shows that national pharmacare programs result in a healthier population and that means less over cost and use on the health system. A national program also offers comprehensive coverage to all Canadians and lowers costs. Providing a robust social system that includes universal access to health care is both critical and essential for Canada to succeed in a global economy.

Canada remains the only developed country with a universal health care system that has no universal prescription drug coverage and that must change. Currently, about 8.4 million working Canadians do not have any prescription drug coverage.



A Healthier Population

The lack of universal access often results in real harm. With non-adherence or drug interactions resulting in hospital admissions, the loss of life and additional public costs is real. The 2015 Angus Reid survey found that 23 per cent of Canadians reported that in the last year, someone in their household did not take their medication as prescribed because of the cost.

Cost Savings

Canadians, and often employers on their behalf through workplace drug plans, pay more for pharmaceuticals than almost any country in the world. Our country's drug spending on a per capita basis is 30 per cent above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average and second amongst OECD countries only after the United States.¹ This is clearly unsustainable in the longer term and workplace drug plans are under enormous pressure to contain, if not shift costs possibly onto the workforce.

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is an intergovernmental economic organisation with 35 member countries, it was founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade.

Recent research has documented a significant international difference in the average per capita expenditures on primary care pharmaceuticals across other high-income nations with universal health systems. In this case, primary care pharmaceuticals include those routinely prescribed by primary care providers in six therapeutic categories: hypertension, pain, cholesterol, diabetes, ulcers and antidepressants.

Comprehensive Coverage

When it comes to prescription drug coverage, Canadians face a bewildering patchwork of programs and plans. An estimated 43 per cent of spending on prescription drugs is through publicly-funded plans that provide coverage for the elderly, people with disabilities and/or low-income Canadians. More than one third, or 35 per cent, is funded by private insurance, with the remainder including another 22 per cent that is paid out-of-pocket by Canadians, when possible.

Prescription drug spending in the private sector has increased drastically over the last two decades from \$3.6 billion in 1993 to almost \$11 billion in 2015. It is estimated that private drug plans reimbursed for \$5.1 billion in 2012 alone without evidence of that spending yielding any therapeutic benefits in return.

Prescription Drug Funding in Canada





What Pharmacare Can Do For All of Us

A national universal pharmacare plan for Canada would improve access and affordability through bulk purchasing and negotiated pricing with drug manufacturers. It would eliminate duplication and cost-shifting amongst existing payers while promoting integration amongst health care providers. A universal plan including an evidence-driven drug assessment process could also help distinguish and discriminate between drug products in order to ensure the quality, safety, and cost-effectiveness of prescribed medicines.

The demand for a national pharmacare plan is one that is widely supported by an overwhelming majority. The latest polls show that 91 per cent of Canadians want a national drug plan.

Recent studies show a national drug plan through bulk purchasing could lower the costs of drugs enough to finance a full pharmacare system with no increase to government costs, and in fact a net savings of up to \$11 billion a year for federal, provincial and territorial governments, the private sector and individual Canadians.

Even the federal Parliamentary Budget Office estimates a minimum savings of at least \$4 billion annually based on the most comprehensive drug coverage.

The History of Supporting Universal Drug Coverage

As far back as 1964, the Royal Commission on Health Services recommended that a universal drug insurance plan be established for all Canadians. The National Health Forum, under Jean Chrétien in 1997, also recommended universal drug coverage. The Romanow Commission in 2002 recommended catastrophic drug coverage as a first step towards universal pharmacare. This call for action is part of Canada's history but now is the time for the federal government to act - it's time for national pharmacare.

A universal pharmacare plan has even more champions today, such as former Ontario Health Minister Dr. Eric Hoskins. Both the Ontario Liberal and Ontario New Democratic parties have proposed significant policy initiatives to support evolving towards a universal pharmacare plan. At the Premiers conference in July 2017, Premiers, including Ontario's Kathleen Wynne, Newfoundland's Dwight Ball and Manitoba's Brian Pallister, all joined together to call on the federal government to bring prescription medications under our medicare system.

Federal Action on Pharmacare and What's Needed

As part of the 2018-2019 budget, the federal government signaled in February an openness to a possible pharmacare program when it announced the creation of an Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare. However, the scope or focus of the advisory council is still unclear and Finance Minister Bill Morneau has hinted that a potential national pharmacare plan may not be universal; therefore it is urgent that advocates re-double their efforts in winning a universal national pharmacare plan.

In April 2018 at the federal level, the all-party House of Commons Standing Committee on Health issued its report, "Pharmacare Now: Prescription Medicine Coverage For All Canadians," calling for a universal, public pharmacare program that would include all Canadians. Unifor is calling on the government to support this report and do the right thing - introduce a national universal pharmacare program before the next federal budget.

Take Action

Unifor is seeking to mobilize people, organizations and voters all cross the country to demand action from governments on pharmacare. To help you join in this lobby initiative Unifor has created a few handy resources right here at your finger tips to lobby for pharmacare.

Whether you are lobbying for pharmacare at the municipal level, or you want to advocate for this important public policy to employers, we have tools to help you do so. Check out the Unifor campaign at unifor.org/pharmacare

If you would like additional resources to lobby for pharmacare, please contact Unifor's Political Action department at politicalaction@unifor.org and we will be happy to help.



Municipal Support for Pharmacare

National pharmacare has the support of Canadians all across Canada. Here are some of the municipalities and municipal associations that have already endorsed national pharmacare:

- 🍁 Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association (NOMA) (April 23, 2015)
- 🍁 Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) (June 2016)
- 🍁 Town of Marathon (April 13, 2015)
- 🍁 City of Hamilton (August 12, 2015)
- 🍁 Town of Ajax (September 14, 2015)
- 🍁 Region of Durham (November 4, 2015)
- 🍁 Regional Municipality of Peel (November 12, 2015)
- 🍁 Town of Whitby (November 23, 2015)
- 🍁 Township of Uxbridge (November 30, 2015)
- 🍁 City of Toronto (December 9, 2015)
- 🍁 Municipality of Clarington (December 15, 2015)
- 🍁 City of Kingston (March 22, 2016)
- 🍁 County of Peterborough (January 18, 2017)
- 🍁 Municipality of Huron East (February 7, 2017)
- 🍁 Township of O'Connor (February 13, 2017)
- 🍁 County of Prince Edward (March 14, 2017)
- 🍁 City of Brantford (March 21, 2017)
- 🍁 City of Thunder Bay (April 9, 2017)



RESOURCE SECTION

Getting municipalities from coast to coast to coast to formally support pharmacare will strengthen our call for provincial and federal governments to also back universal prescription drug coverage. Below is a municipal motion you can present to city councillors to call for national pharmacare. You can use this as is or adapt it for your needs.

Draft Municipal Motion National Pharmacare Program

WHEREAS the [City /Town/Region] of _____ has recognized and has demonstrated over the past years its commitment to the importance of healthy citizens as the foundation of a healthy, engaged and economically vibrant community;

Over three million Canadians, including many in our local communities, don't take medicines prescribed by their doctors because they can't afford them;

Canada is currently the only country with a national medicare program that does not have a national pharmacare program;

The risk of having no insurance for medicines is high among lower income Canadians which includes service industry employees, those in precarious employment and seasonal workers;

Studies show that adding a national pharmacare program to our national health care system would lower costs to businesses by over \$8 billion per year, providing Canadian companies competitive advantages in international trade;

Recent research confirms that these gains can be achieved with little or no increase in public investment;

Municipal government expenses for employee benefits would be significantly reduced by a national pharmacare program;

A national prescription drug formulary would support better quality prescribing, including reducing dangerous and inappropriate prescribing to Canadian seniors; and

A National Pharmacare plan is sound policy, both economically and socially, the [City /Town/Region] of _____ express its support for the creation of a National Pharmacare program as an extension of Canadian Medicare, since health and economic studies now show that such a policy would improve health in municipalities, give local businesses a competitive advantage in the global marketplace and lower costs for municipal government on taxpayers.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the [City/Town/Region] of _____ call on the [Province/Territory] of _____ to work with the other provinces/territories and the federal government to develop and implement a national pharmacare program.

RESOURCE SECTION

Joint Union-Employer Letter for Unifor Workplaces

Employers have vested interest in pharmacare, given that they fund a portion of prescription drug coverage for employees. Getting employers on board with national pharmacare is an integral way of building support for this campaign. Here is a letter template to employers so that companies can add support for national pharmacare.

Joint Letter in Support of a Canadian Universal Pharmacare Program

Unifor and _____ both recognize their commitment to the importance of the well - being of citizens as the foundation of a healthy, engaged and economically vibrant community.

Over three million Canadians, including many in our local communities, don't take medicines prescribed by their doctors because they can't afford them. Additionally, over eight million working Canadians do not have prescription drug coverage.

Canada is currently the only country with a national medicare program that does not have a national pharmacare program. Studies have concluded that countries with such coverage achieve better access to medicines and greater financial protection for the ill - at significantly lower costs.

Every major commission or study in Canada, dating back to the 1964 Royal Commission on Health Services, the 1996 National Forum on Health Care in Canada and the 2002 Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada has recommended extending coverage to include prescription drugs.

More recent studies show that a national drug plan could be financed with potentially no increase to government costs and save Canadians billions of dollars annually. Even the federal Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) estimates minimum savings of at least \$4 billion annually based on the most comprehensive drug coverage.

A universal pharmacare plan for Canada would improve access and affordability through bulk purchase and negotiated pricing with drug manufacturers; and it would eliminate duplication and cost - shifting amongst existing payers, while promoting integration amongst health care providers.

To this end, Unifor and _____ jointly urge the federal, provincial and territorial governments to take immediate action in instituting a national, universally - accessible Pharmacare program.

Sincerely,
